

STARS AND STRIPES®

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William Black

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MONDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2004

50¢

Car bombings in Najaf, Karbala kill at least 60



A gunman, left, kills a man lying in Baghdad's Haifa Street after the victim was pulled from a car Sunday. The man and two others, including the man at right on his knees, all employees of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq, were killed in an ambush. About 30 militants hurling hand grenades and firing machine guns attacked a car carrying the workers, who were dragged into the street and executed. Two others in the car escaped unhurt.

AP

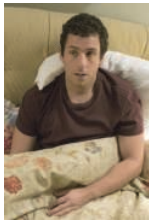
Iraqi election workers gunned down in Baghdad street

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Scene on Sunday

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feel like home

Scene on Sunday

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News Tracker ... What's new with old news

States

Gay marriage controversy: Social Security Administration officials have begun to reject marriage documents from New Paltz, N.Y., that were issued after Feb. 27, when the village's mayor, Jason West, started performing wedding ceremonies for gay couples.

The policy is part of a document called "Evidence of Identity for an SSN Card," which dictates what documents can be used to obtain a Social Security Card. But the agency stopped recognizing marriage certificates in New Paltz that date after the February date. The agency says in the policy that the legality of the documents is "unresolved at the state level."

Eric Rudolph trial: A federal judge has ruled that investigators properly seized evidence from bombing suspect Eric Rudolph's trailer and shed in North Carolina, making it admissible at trial.

Rudolph's attorneys had argued that federal agents improperly seized items such as books, a sales receipt, \$1,600 in cash, two daggers, bayonets and pistols, which were not within the scope of the search warrants.

But prosecutors said Rudolph had abandoned his property to go into hiding in the North Carolina wilderness after he was linked to the 1998 bombing of a Birmingham, Ala., abortion clinic that killed an off-duty police officer and injured a nurse.

Pauline Gore funeral: Former Vice President Al Gore remembered his mother at her funeral Saturday as an inspiring role model for women who believed education was the "key to freedom in life."

"She wanted everyone to personally feel the enlightenment from knowledge that she had left in her own life," Gore said of Pauline LaFon Gore, who died Wednesday at the age of 92.

More than 200 people attended the funeral at the United Methodist Church in Carthage, Tenn., a small town about 50 miles east of Nashville where the Gore family owns a farm.

Business

Anti-spamming lawsuit: A federal judge has awarded an Internet service provider more than \$1 billion in what is believed to be the largest judgment ever against spammers.

Robert Kramer, whose company provides e-mail service for about 5,000 subscribers in eastern Iowa, filed suit against 300 spammers after his inbound mail servers received up to 10 million spam e-mails a day in 2000, according to court documents.

U.S. District Judge Charles R. Wolfe filed default judgments Friday against three of the defendants under the Federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act and the Iowa Ongoing Criminal Conduct Act.

World

North Korea sanctions: Japan's foreign minister warned North Korea on Sunday to recognize that it is running out of time to halt its nuclear weapons programs before Tokyo and its allies decide to impose economic sanctions on the isolated communist state.

At a summit meeting in southern Japan Friday, Japan's prime minister promised



Palestinian presidential election: International European Observers for the Palestinian Authority presidential election leave the Grand Park Hotel Sunday in the West Bank town of Ramallah, heading into various Palestinian cities. Forty-two long-term observers from the European Union Election Observation Mission to the West Bank and Gaza have arrived in Ramallah for the forthcoming Palestinian Authority presidential election.

South Korea's president that Tokyo would hold off imposing economic sanctions on North Korea for now. North Korea said last week it would treat sanctions as a "declaration of war."

But Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura said Pyongyang wasn't off the hook yet.

"North Korea needs to recognize that it doesn't have much time left," Machimura said during a talk show aired by public broadcaster NHK, adding, "As for setting a specific date as the deadline, we're still considering whether to declare one."

Palestinian prisoners: Israel on Sunday approved the release of 170 Palestinian prisoners in a goodwill gesture toward Egypt and the new Palestinian leadership, officials said, but a Palestinian official dismissed the Israeli move as "cosmetic."

News of the prisoner release came hours after Israel ended a 24-hour military operation in the southern Gaza Strip, leaving dozens of Palestinian homes in rubble.

The prisoner release was part of a deal with Egypt this month that brought home an Israeli jailed by Cairo on espionage charges.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called Sunday's decision by a ministerial committee a "goodwill gesture" and spoke of "deep friendship" for Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Australia Embassy attack: The Muslim militants accused of bombing Australia's Embassy in Indonesia stopped to pray at a mosque next to a government ministry moments before they carried out the attack, police revealed Sunday.

The disclosure came during a police reconstruction of the group's alleged movements ahead of the Sept. 9 blast, which killed 10 people, one of them apparently a suicide bomber, and injured more than 100.

It came days after foreign governments warned that Islamic militants were planning more attacks on Western targets in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country.

Haiti government standoff: In a move ap-

plying both force and appeasement, officials of the beleaguered interim government said Saturday that they had ended an armed standoff with soldiers of the disbanded Haitian army by promising them back wages and jobs in exchange for their weapons.

While more radical elements of the demobilized army remained at large, the government of interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue and the head of U.N. peacekeeping forces cast the bloodless settlement of the latest security crisis as a resolute display of commitment to disarm any faction menacing public order.

Fighting in Sudan: Sudan's government kept up attacks on rebels in Darfur, defying a deadline set by African Union mediators for an end to active hostilities, AU officials said.

U.N. mediators at peace talks held by the Nigerian capital, Abuja, gave Sudan and rebel delegates a 24-hour ultimatum Friday to stop fighting by 6 p.m. Saturday or face possible referral to the U.N. Security Council. AU spokesman Assane Ba told reporters government helicopters were attacking the town of Labado. But Sudan's government claimed it was defending against an insurgent offensive.

War on terrorism

Gitmo tribunals: Two prisoners with alleged ties to the al-Qaida terrorist network appeared Saturday before a U.S. military review tribunal in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

One detainee, whose age was unknown, was accused of shooting an Afghan militiaman and two civilians in 2003, said Navy Lt. Gary Ross, a spokesman for the Combatant Status Review Tribunals. Afghan militiamen captured the detainee a year ago after a shootout and grenade battle, Ross said.

Regional and factional militaries helped the United States rout the Taliban in late 2001. The militias are being disbanded under a U.N.-sponsored peace plan, and the United States and its allies are training a new Afghan army.

Stories and photo from wire services

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Cold weather perfect for battle anniversary

For Battle of the Bulge re-enactors, dressing up is their 'tribute' to vets

BY KEVIN DOUGHERTY

Stars and Stripes

BASTOGNE, Belgium — Much like it did 60 years ago, the weather finally broke Sunday for those assembled in the Ardennes, allowing events to unfold according to script.

It may not have been as cold and as snowy as it was during the Battle of the Bulge, but the past couple of days have had an edge to them. On Sunday, the final day for commemorative ceremonies marking the historic battle, the skies parted and the sun surfaced just in time to allow 19 American re-enactors to parachute over the grounds of the Mardasson, the village's World War II memorial park.

"The jump was nice, a little windy though," said Jan Patronek, the first man to leap out of the vintage Dakota aircraft. "It was colder in the airplane than on the ground."

Up until the last hour, the noon-time jump was touch and go due to a low blanket of clouds. The weather in Belgium and Luxembourg over the past few days has been cold and windy. Coupled with the snow that fell Friday, conditions in the Ardennes region are similar to what soldiers and their allies endured 60 years ago.

"We have to share the pleasures," cracked Stephan Hadjadj, a French re-enactor who watched the parachute jump.

The pleasure has been all Bastogne's.

Thousands of residents turned out Saturday night for an outdoor sound and light show, a show that yanked people back to the tenuous days of the war. Except for several searchlights scouring the heavens, all lights downtown were extinguished to heighten the effect. Pre-recorded sounds of gunfire and bombs echoed through the streets. The show ended with an impressive fire-

works display.

In addition to the parachute jump, Sunday's itinerary included a church service in Noville and a ceremony in the hamlets of Baugnez honoring a group of American prisoners executed by their German captors.

U.S. Marine Corps Gen. James Jones, the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, attended the later event.

The weekend concluded with a two-hour parade of WWII vintage vehicles through the city of Bastogne.

"Many of us still remember," said Hadjadj, one of 24 Frenchmen, who spent the weekend clad in period military clothing. Dressing up "is our tribute to the guys who did it."

Anniversaries such as this one always draw hundreds of re-enactors. Usually, they only dress the part, but Hadjadj and his group took their passion one cold step further. Friday night found them digging foxholes in the Breuchy woods, southwest of Bastogne. Believe it or not they stayed put, occasionally going out "on patrol," mostly to warm up.

"We didn't sleep, not at all," Hadjadj said.

"It was cold, and it was wet," added Anton Holgersson, a Frenchman whose father served in the U.S. Navy during the war. "But it was also a good experience to see how they lived."

A half hour earlier one of today's sailors spied another group of re-enactors making their way toward the Mardasson.

Navy Cmdr. Tim Trampenau and his young son came to Bastogne for the day from Stuttgart, Germany. Two other dad-son teams joined them as part of a casual outing for their local Webelos den.

"They have fun with it, which seems kind of strange to us," Trampenau said of the re-enactors. He then smiled: "Why don't



Above: Re-enactors with U.S. World War II military vehicles wait before they parade at the 60th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge in the city center of Bastogne, Belgium, on Saturday. King Albert II and other dignitaries marked the anniversary by honoring thousands of American soldiers who died fighting Nazi Germany's desperate bid to stop the Allied advance.
Right: People look at paratroopers as they jumped out of a military aircraft close to the WWII Mardasson War Memorial monument on Sunday.

AP photos

they dress up as French or Belgian guys?"

Trampenau then answered his own question, noting that people the world over like to be associated with winners. But men and women who participated in the war epitomized the term winner by anyone's standard.

One of the millions of vets from the war was Patronek's



94-year-old father, Walter, who served in the Pacific theater.

"It's been a busy year, three trips to Europe," said Patronek, eluding to earlier commemorations in Normandy, France, and Holland.

Patronek, a resident of Oklahoma and a member of a WWII airborne demonstration team, posed for pictures with people after his

jump. He was a popular man, and even more popular once he started talking to the locals about his father.

"The respect and gratitude they show us when we come here is heart warming," Patronek said. "It's probably the greatest reward."

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BEN MURRAY/Stars and Stripes

Italian Carabinieri members Antonio Altavilla, left, and Cosimo Visconti, center, visit with staff members at the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany on Thursday, a little more than a year after the soldiers were admitted to the hospital with critical injuries.

Carabinieri visit Landstuhl to thank American doctors

BY BEN MURRAY

Stars and Stripes

LANDSTUHL, Germany — When Italian Carabinieri member Antonio Altavilla came to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in November 2003, doctors had doubts that he would leave alive.

Critically wounded during a suicide bomb attack in Nasiriyah, Iraq, which killed 17 of his comrades, Altavilla's lungs and liver were badly injured, and he was bleeding internally.

"We thought at least three or four times that he wasn't going to make it," said Col. Tyler Putnam, Chief of General and Specialty Surgery at Landstuhl. "Literally for a month it was nip and tuck. [He had] the highest injury severity score you can have."

Likewise, Cosimo Visconti, another Carabinieri injured in the attack, could have spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

But Altavilla and Visconti both walked into Landstuhl with smiles on their faces Thursday in what hospital officials said was the first-ever return visit by foreign soldiers treated at the American facility. The two Italians, fully recovered from their injuries, wanted to personally thank the doctors and "see the faces of the people who helped him," Altavilla said through an interpreter.

The two men walked through several wings of the hospital, shaking hands with staff members and meeting people from the intensive care unit, which treated them when they first arrived.

The visit was a rare opportunity for hospital staff to see the results of their work, Putnam said, because Landstuhl often acts as a way station for critical patients being moved to stateside hospitals.

"It's incredible," he said. "It's a great morale booster."

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Bamberg childcare options running thin

Moves leave day-care program short on workers

BY RICK EMERT

Stars and Stripes

BAMBERG, Germany — Bamberg's Child Development Center and Family Child Care Program knows how difficult it is to find a babysitter.

The center operates with only half of its 20 positions filled, and it will lose nine of its 11 family caregivers when 1st Infantry Division returns from Iraq and goes on black leave in February, according to Lily Markey and Elizabeth Marriott.

Markey is the Child and Youth Services coordinator and Marriott is the acting Family Child Care director and trainer for the 279th Base Support Battalion on Warner Barracks.

"We always have some positions unfilled, maybe two or three, but 50 percent is not normal," Markey said.

She attributes the shortage, in part, to fallout from the summer permanent change of station, or PCS, season; the time of year when many families move to new assignments to avoid taking their kids out of school midyear.

Other contributing factors, she said, include families going to the States while their soldiers are deployed to Iraq.

"We don't have a large pool of civilians

to draw from, so we really rely on family members to fill these positions," she said.

Currently, organizers are planning for the 1st ID's return and impact of losing all but two of their workers.

"We are looking for subproviders to cover for when that happens," Marriott said.

Child and Youth Services in Bamberg currently has 42 children registered for day care, and there are nine children on the waiting list.

If a baby boom hits Bamberg when the more than 1,000 soldiers from Warner Barracks deployed to Iraq reunite with their families, as it has in other military communities, there could be many more infants added to the waiting list, Markey said.

To become a child-care provider in one's own home, a person must submit to a background check. The check looks primarily for any instances of spousal or child abuse in an applicant's past. There is a credit check, but that is not necessarily a deciding factor in an applicant's hire.

"I think we only have one or two derogatory background checks a year," Marriott said.

In that instance, a quality review board comprised of representatives from the Judge Advocate General's Office, Provost Marshal Office, Social Work Services and



RICK EMERT/Stars and Stripes

Wilmarie Ortiz, 16 months, helps Allison Tucker unload the dishwasher Friday at Tucker's home in Bamberg, Germany. Tucker is a family child-care provider on Warner Barracks, and cares for seven children in her home.

Child and Youth Services convene to determine whether the results warrant refusing employment, Markey said.

"Most of the time, it was just a dumb kid thing that someone did years ago, and it won't stop them from being hired," Marriott said.

At home, child-care providers can care for up to six children with no more than two infants and no more than three children under age 3, Marriott said.

All family members in the home over age 12 have to go through a background check as well, Marriott said.

Allison Tucker has been a child-care pro-

vider since 2002, but took a one-year break while her husband was deployed.

"It's something you have to discuss with the family first, because there are things you are required to have in the home," Tucker said.

Her living room is sectioned off to accommodate children, and all guests who visit while she has children over have to sign a log sheet.

"I love my job; it's wonderful," she said, while playing with 16-month-old Wilmarie Ortiz, one of her charges. "I get paid to do this."

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Intel analyst gives wounded troops a chance to forget their troubles

BY WARD SANDERSON

Stars and Stripes

William Black has been there before himself. Hot lands where the Beirut sand and sea from dun to red with blood spilled in war.

For the retired Marine infantry and tactical intelligence man, those lands were the Persian Gulf and Lebanon. Luckily timed leave saved him from the Beirut embassy bombing in 1983 that killed 63 people. A car chase with Lebanese intelligence officers saw his damaged, armored car screeching around corners at 90 miles per hour. He's heard the whoosh of a rocket-propelled grenade over his head.

"I've been in a bunch of shooting matches," Black said, quickly adding that he implies no bravado. "I'm no hero, and I know what fear is. I know what being in fear for an extended time can do to you."

That's why Black, now a civilian analyst with the Army's 66th Military Intelligence Group, decided to start sending troops down the river — the Rhine River, that is. Black took Bob Hope's strategy and began showing injured troops a good time to speed their recovery. During the past year he's taken about 150 troops out of Landstuhl Regional Medical Center and onto Rhine cruises. The troops dine, sip wine and see sights.

"I can't lead Marines in combat anymore. That's over for me," he said. "But I know that if I can't help pick up the pieces."

He calls the program Wounded Warrior. And though Black down-



Courtesy of William Black

Participants of the Wounded Warrior program offer a toast to the camera during their tour of the Rhine River valley. Retired Marine William Black, bottom left, is a civilian analyst for the 66th Military Intelligence Group in Greisheim, Germany.

plays any dents in his wallet, colleagues say he initially paid for much of this himself. It costs about \$1,000 to organize each tour group, which typically includes about a dozen injured.

"It's a great program, and being a former Marine, he's got a big heart," said Warrant Officer 2 Alan Morano, the 66th's counterterrorism chief. "He's really been the driving force behind this ... it helps soldiers tremendously. The open up. They laugh. They break down. They cry. They run the whole spectrum."

Some troops have lost limbs or suffered severe facial burns or lost vision. Others endure conventional woes, everything from kid-

ney stones to heart murmurs. One woman was recovering from a compacted spine after months of wearing battle rattle. One injured Marine who recently took the cruise had refused to leave Iraq until Fallujah fell.

Landstuhl spokeswoman Marie Shaw said the cruise patients are all well enough to go on a day trip, but not far along enough to go home or return to the front.

"Those people don't have to have constant medical supervision," Shaw said.

Black chose the Rhine as therapy because he grew up in Germany and now lives in the hamlet of Kiedrich along its banks. He said he has long loved that valley.

Stripes Spotlight

William Black

Black created the Wounded Warrior program, which takes recovering troops out of their beds at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center and gives them a tour along the Rhine River.

Age: 50

Job: Analyst, 66th Military Intelligence Group, Griesheim, Germany

Hometown: The son of Air Force employees, he grew up in Wiesbaden, Germany.

Stars and Stripes

"It's the quiet, the opportunity for them to reflect a little bit on something other than being sick, a war, and them being away from their families," Black said.

He and his wounded warriors start out at Sankt Goar and spend the day ogling Cinderella castles, vines and gables, and half-timbered houses that look as if they're made from gingerbread. They stop at Black's favorite restaurant in Kiedrich, where the owner charges them 10 euro a plate for a

30-euro meal and his wife will cut an injured Marine's steak like a mother would for her child. A vintner gives them samples of local wine.

Troops leave the hospital frazzled and jumpy. On the bus to the river, the troops are still alert for insurgents.

"They're looking for people on bridges," Black said. They're watching for car bombs.

As the day unfolds the troops relax and begin to remember what it's like to feel normal in a normal place.

"They're much more positive, more carefree," said 1st Lt. Jacob MacGregor, the officer in charge of Landstuhl's medical transition detachment. "They kind of realize there's more to life than what they've been through."

The 66th now hosts weekly fundraisers to pay for the cruises so Black doesn't have to. And they're successful. A hot dog sale made \$900. Privates were donating as much as \$50. Black has found that he gets something besides satisfaction out of the trips, too: The troops tell him what it's really like on the ground, which aids him in his intel job.

Black's baby of an idea has grown up. Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, former commander of coalition forces in Iraq, even went along once.

But the true measure of Wounded Warrior comes from the quiet remarks of troops suddenly forgetful of bleak landscapes of blood and sand.

"Omigod," Black recalled troops saying, blinking in disbelief at the shores. "Look at the trees!"

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At least 60 killed in suicide car bombings

Blasts hit Najaf, Karbala an hour apart; in Baghdad, 3 election workers executed in street

BY ABDUL HUSEIN
AL-OBEIDI

The Associated Press

NAJAF, Iraq — Car bombs exploded Sunday at a Najaf funeral procession and Karbala's main bus station, killing at least 60 people and wounding more than 120 in apparently coordinated attacks in Iraq's holiest Shiite cities. Dozens of gunmen roamed a main street in downtown Baghdad, killing three Iraqi election workers in a vicious attack designed to disrupt next month's parliamentary ballot.

The deadly strikes highlighted the apparent ability of the insurgents to launch attacks almost at will, striking in the heart of Baghdad and in numerous other cities despite confident assessments by U.S. military commanders that they had regained the initiative after last month's campaign against militants in Fallujah.

The bombings in Najaf and Karbala, predominantly Shiite cities 45 miles from each other south of Baghdad, came just over an hour apart. The first was a suicide blast that ripped through minibuses at the entrance of Karbala's main bus station, followed by a car bomb in a central Najaf square crowded with people watching a funeral procession after the city police chief and provincial governor.

"There's no doubt that there's a strong link between these two incidents," said Jalal Eddin al-Sagheer, an official with the leading Shiite political party, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution.

"These operations aim at provoking the Shiites away from the political process and toward acts of revenge to undermine the national will," he added. "The whole issue has to do with elections."

Hospital officials said 47 people were killed and at least 90 others wounded in the blast, which went off about 400 yards from the Imam Ali Shrine, the holiest Shiite site in Iraq.

The car bomb detonated in Na-



An image of the aftermath following a suicide car bomber detonated his vehicle outside Karbala's main bus station on Sunday. The blast killed at least 13 people, according to hospital officials. An hour later, a car bomb shattered a central square in Najaf, crowded with residents watching a funeral procession, killing at least 47 people. More than 120 others were wounded in both attacks.

jaf's central Maidan Square where a large crowd of people had gathered for the funeral procession of a tribal sheik — about 100 yards from where Gov. Adnan al-Zurfi and police chief Ghaleb al-Jazzari were standing.

Al-Jazzari believed he and al-Zurfi were the targets of the attack, in which he said three blasts were heard at about 2:45 p.m. Both men were hurt.

It was not immediately clear what the other explosions were from.

Residents were pulling bodies of the dead from damaged shops at the square, which is about 400 yards from the Imam Ali Shrine, the holiest Shiite site in Iraq.

The Karbala blast destroyed about 10 passenger minibuses and set ablaze five cars outside the crowded Bag Baghdad bus station.

Firefighters tried to put out the fires as ambulances ferried burned and bleeding casualties to the nearby Al-Husseini hospital.

Hospital official Ali al-Ardawi said 13 people were killed and 33 injured.

It was Karbala's second bombing in a week. On Wednesday, a bomb exploded at the city's gold-domed Imam Hussein Shrine, killing eight people and wounding 40 in an apparent attempt to kill a top aide to Iraq's most powerful Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

The shrine, located near the bus station, was hit on March 2 by suicide bombing that killed 85 people and wounded 100. The holy sites in Najaf and Karbala, south of Baghdad, house the tombs of Shia Islam's most revered saints.

Mutassim Bellah was an ancient Iraqi military commander.

"We warn the director of (Saddi Group) ... to close the company completely and all its branches and to leave Iraq, otherwise those (hostages) who are in our grasp will be killed," a masked militant wearing a traditional black Arab robe said in comments recorded on the tape obtained by the AP.

The tape, which could not be immediately verified, showed at least four insurgents with their faces covered by traditional Arab head scarves and posing with machine guns.

Chad Knauss, an American and deputy chief operations officer of Sandi Group in Iraq, declined to comment on claims that his company's employees had been kidnapped.

The violence was the latest in an insurgent campaign to disrupt the crucial elections, the first national polls since Saddam Hussein's fall — and the latest to target Shiite Muslims, Iraq's majority community that will most likely to dominate the vote.

In Baghdad, about 30 armed insurgents, hurling hand grenades and firing guns, ambushed a car carrying five election officials — executing three — during the morning rush-hour on central Haifa Street, the scene of repeated clashes between U.S. forces and insurgents.

Three officials of the nongovernmental Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq were dragged from their car, which was later set alight. Two escaped unharmed.

Pistol-wielding gunmen —

their faces uncovered — forced the officials to kneel in the middle of Haifa Street, while the traffic behind them on the thoroughfare braked to a halt and panicked drivers tried to reverse away from the ambush site. One of the officials was punched by the gunmen as he got on the ground, before the militants shot all three at point-blank range.

The commission condemned the attack as a "terrorist ambush."

"The IEI urges the Iraqi people and all its political, religious, and social leaders, and the authorities to condemn this inhuman crime, which has brought shame on our people and country," the commission said.

A police official said the ferocity of the clashes prevented police from nearing the scene. The attackers, most of whom were seen brazenly roaming Haifa Street without anything covering their faces, later set fire to at least one other vehicle before melting away as U.S. and Iraqi National Guard forces cordoned off the area.

Sunni elder statesman Adnan Pachachi, who heads a field of 70 centers of senior Sunni clerics demanding a boycott.

Among the militants fanning the insurgency are many Islamic extremists, believed to be mainly Sunnis, who have long prestige and privilege since their former sponsor, fellow Sunni Saddam Hussein, was toppled.

Interim Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, a pro-American secular Shiite, said an increase in attacks ahead of the elections had been anticipated.

"For sure we expect strikes and we hope the cries of our people will be open to inform authorities and help them in doing their job," told al-Iraqiya TV.

Associated Press Writers Marwan Fares and Samir N. Yacoub in Baghdad and Gassia Jabbar in Karbala contributed to this report.

Kidnapping claim

BAGHDAD — Insurgents claiming to represent three Iraqi militant groups released a videotape Saturday saying they had captured 10 Iraqis working for an American security and reconstruction company and would kill them if their firm did not leave

this turbulent country.

The groups, claiming to be the Mujahideen Army, The Black Banner Brigade and the Mu'tassim Bellah Brigade, also threatened more attacks on Iraqi operations of the company, Washington, D.C.-headquartered Sandi Group, and anyone who cooperated with it.

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U.S. deaths in Iraq

The Associated Press

As of Saturday, at least 1,304 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. At least 1,021 died as a result of hostile action, the Defense Department said.

The figures include three military civilians.

The AP count is four higher than the Defense Department's tally last updated at 11:30 a.m. EST Friday.

The British military has reported 74 deaths; Italy, 19; Poland, 13; Spain, 11; Ukraine, nine; Bulgaria, seven; Slovakia, three; Estonia, Thailand and the Netherlands, two each; Denmark, El Salvador, Hungary and Latvia one death each.

Since May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, U.S. military members have died, according to AP's count. That includes at least 912 deaths resulting from hostile action, according to the military's numbers.

The latest deaths reported by the military:

■ No new deaths reported.

The latest identifications reported by the military:

■ Marine Lance Cpl. Franklin A. Swager, 24, San Antonio, killed Thursday in Iraq's Anbar province; assigned to 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, III Marine Expeditionary Force, Marine Corps Base, Hawaii.

Iraqis at the gate



A member of the Iraqi National Guard searches an Iraqi worker entering Logistics Support Area Anaconda, Iraq, on Thursday. About 1,000 Iraqis work on the base. The job of checking them falls to the 181st Support Battalion and members of the Iraqi National Guard.

PHOTOS BY RON JENSEN
Stars and Stripes

“If we have any question about an Iraqi person, we send them home. We don’t take any chances.”

Sgt. Douglas Peterson

Soldiers keep wary eye on workers passing through Anaconda’s checkpoint

BY RON JENSEN

Stars & Stripes

LOGISTICS SUPPORT AREA ANACONDA Iraq — Every day hundreds of Iraqis flow through the gates at Logistics Support Area Anaconda.

They are either people with jobs on base or people who want work, if even for a few hours. Still more come with big trucks to deliver goods to America’s largest supply hub in Iraq.

No matter how familiar the faces or how harmless they may look, soldiers of the 181st Support Battalion, part of the 81st Brigade Combat Team, consider each a possible threat.

“If we have any question about an Iraqi person, we send them home,” said Sgt. Douglas Peterson. “We don’t take any chances.”

Each day, usually between 8 and 10 a.m., about 1,000 Iraqis walk through the base’s north gate. They are searched and their identification scrutinized numerous times.

Peterson, a carpenter back in Washington state, watches every day as people file past him to be searched by Iraqi National Guard soldiers. His eyes peeled for bulky coats that might hide explosives, he said, or a person who wants to be searched only by a particular individual.

Iraqis often carry guns, he said, and sometimes one will forget to leave it at the check-in point for weapons.

“We don’t take that lightly here,” he said. “We look and load.”

Alcohol, electronic gear and knives are a few of the contraband not allowed on the base. The Iraqi soldiers pat down their countrymen from head to toe, checking their coat pockets



Sgt. Justin Jones of Company D, 181st Support Battalion, 81st Brigade Combat Team checks an Iraqi worker.

and even looking inside packs of cigarettes.

“Everyone’s checked,” said 1st Lt. Annmarie Stormo, so it may take around 45 minutes for an Iraqi to maneuver through the maze of checkpoints and holding areas.

At the end of the day, the process is repeated. Everyone leaving the base is searched.

Capt. Stan Seo said the soldiers look for computers, documents and even soldiers’ mail.

After the morning’s initial check, the base visitors are segregated. The permanent workers with red badges go to one line where they are checked again before entering.

Those hoping for work are put in an area where they wait for a job that may or may not appear.



A sign at the north gate of Logistics Support Area Anaconda, Iraq, tells anyone entering which items they can’t bring onto the base.

If units on base need a building painted or a fence repaired, they can come and choose from the

waiting crowd.

“Every day I come here, but no work,” one man in the hold-

ing area said in English. “My father, sick.”

Staff Sgt. Larry Larson, who is a health technician for the military in Spokane, Wash., said he feels sorry for the Iraqis who come looking for work. Some, he said, have worked for units that have left Iraq, so he’s tried to hook them up with the replacement.

“I feel for them,” he said. “I wish there was more I could do for them.”

The individuals have not caused many problems for the soldiers of the 81st BCT, which is a National Guard unit from Washington state.

Vehicle traffic, on the other hand, has sometimes stiffened the soldiers’ backs when a bomb is found on a truck.

“We’ve had quite a few, enough to keep everyone on their toes,” said Seo.

Stormo said bombs are usually placed on the trucks without the driver’s knowledge. Recently, a truck rolled toward the gate with a bomb on its gas tank, but it was discovered before it got close.

“I call it probing,” said Stormo. “They’re trying to see how far they can get before we detect it.” Truckers sometimes find the bombs and tell the soldiers. Bomb-sniffing dogs are also used to check vehicle traffic.

Bombs aren’t the only thing on the checklist. Sgt. David Medzyk said he is looking for anything on the contraband list, which he finds “pretty often.”

At the gates, the soldiers know there is never a time they can let their guard down.

“We’re the last check. If we miss it, it’s on the post somewhere,” Medzyk said. “And we haven’t missed yet.”

E-mail Ron Jensen at: jensenr@mail.strips.esd.mil

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Above: "Ice Man" was taken in April 2003 outside of Kut, in south-east Iraq. This man was a manager of a ice factory and actually lived in his store after the invasion began. Right: "Gathered In Holy Cloth" was taken in May 2003 near Badrah, 75 miles east of Baghdad. The bones were exhumed from a mass grave.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BENJAMIN B. BUSCH



Marine's war photos go on display at Md. school

BY LEO SHANE III

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Even though thousands of pictures have been taken during the U.S. occupation in Iraq, Maj. Benjamin Busch doesn't think many Americans have really seen the country.

The Marine took hundreds of photos of his own during his 13-month tour following the invasion of Iraq, and will be displaying 100 of them at University of Maryland University College in College Park, Md., next month. He thinks they show an unfiltered look at everyday Iraqis, and their reaction to the war.

"This exhibit does not insist that the war was a mistake or that it was necessary; those positions have lost their relevance," he said. "It simply states that it is a war and that we have a duty to understand our situation now that that distant country is a part of our lives."

Busch, 36, an actor who has performed in a number of television shows including "The West Wing" and "The Wire," has been an amateur photographer since graduating from college. He also served as the commanding officer of Delta Company, 4th Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, which arrived in eastern Iraq in April 2003.

The pictures in the exhibit were all taken in the following six months, as his unit moved along the Iranian border. "It was very difficult to take this series of photographs during my first deployment," he said. "I was the provisional military au-

thority for a large piece of territory ... I could not allow myself or my Marines to be considered vulnerable tourists.

"There are thousands of images that I had to walk or drive past simply because the moment had not been appropriate to pause."

What he did record is a series of faces and emotions of Iraqi citizens watching their country undergo dramatic changes. A number of his photos were put on display at Vassar College in New York earlier this year, and Busch was impressed with how well the audience could separate controversy surrounding the war from the pictures themselves.

"Intelligent viewers appreciated the messages in the exhibit for what they were," he said. "The photos were taken by a Marine with an unlikely combination of both a military and an artistic perspective in a combat zone."

Busch is scheduled to return to Iraq next month, shortly after his exhibit, "The Art of War," opens. He said he isn't sure what to expect on the return trip.

"When I took most of the photographs in this show, I was able to make and, to a certain extent, control the first impression that the Iraqi people had of American occupation," he said. "This time I will be operating in an area corrupted by our armed response to an increasingly popular insurgency."

"But I will bring my camera. I don't go there to take pictures, I take pictures because I am there."

E-mail Leo Shane at: shanel@stripes.osd.mil

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News from the North Pole

SANTA INDICATES THAT THE FOLLOWING BOYS AND GIRLS HAVE BEEN VERY GOOD THIS YEAR AND WILL SOON BE RECEIVING A PERSONALIZED NOTE FROM SANTA!

Due to an overwhelming response, I have asked Stars and Stripes to print additional pages to list the names of all the children who wrote to me this year. Please check "News from the North Pole" in your Stars and Stripes on 20, 21, and 22 December. I'll see you very soon!
~Santa



Cody Allen	Isabella Duncan	Pat Jr. Lamb	Tyla Simcox	King	Mrs. Thompson's 1st	Erin Rogers
Andres Almanza	Taylor Duncan	Noah Lamb	Hannah Simmons	Tasia	grade	Hohenfels
Ian Almanza	Josee Dussault	Adrianna Lamb	Brandon Simmons	Misa	Cody	Elementary School
DaVin Anderson	Sara Dygert	Kaitlyn Lecklier	Joshua Simmons	Kai	Connor	Kindergarten class
Jackson Anton	Catrina Dygert	Rusly Lecklier	Tyler Simmons	Mikayla	Emily	A.J.
Olivia Anton	Rachel Ellison	Noah Lecklier	Connor Simpson	Jacob	Emmanuel	Adam
Isabella Arguello	Chelsey Emery	Brandon Lock	Joseph Simpson	Taylor	Fiona	Aidan
Eddie Bailey	Christopher	Joshua Long	Miranda Smith	Kiki	Ilise	Alexis
Lyn Barber	Erickson	Lora Lorentsen	Da'Von Solomon	Andrew	Jaisha	Alyssia
Ben Barber	Kristin Erickson	Parker Ludwig	Dylan Sopko	Natalie	Jonathan	Anthony
Tim Barber	Riley Erickson	Mackenzie Ludwig	Cheri Spencer	Zoe	Justin	Christina
Larry Baricuatro	Jared Esmond	Joshua Lukins	Dylan Stephens	Arian	Kevin	Darwin
Sonja Baricuatro	Allison Farrar	Sarah Lukins	Hannah Stephens	Lizzy	Kyle	Emma C.
Jessica Barker	Kaitlyn Farrar	Rebekah Lukins	Lucinda Steven	Judy	Margaret	Emma G.
Olen Bass	Minnie Fawcett	Justin Magram	Emilia Steen	Mallory	Nathan	Jeremy
Scarlet Bass	Kiera Fields	Amber Maldonado	Virginia Stoll	Courtney	Richard	Jessica
Michael Beattie	Kristian Flanagan	Miguel Maldonado	Matthew Stone	Keith	Shelton	Justin
Shauna Becroft	Kandace Fordham	Kinsey Martin	Emily Manzo	Isian	Shawn	Kaitlyn
Emily Becroft	Evie Forster	Harley Forster	Kaitlin Stone	Robert	Michael	Kayla
Lucas Bell	Ashlee Fowler	Seth Fowler	Jake Tatum	Michael	Mrs. Hoyanica's	Kelsey
Sydney Bell	Ashlee Fowler	Makenna Martin	Maria Taylor	Robert	Kindergarten	Dan
Abby Bennett	Seth Fowler	Gabriel Mastran	Kaleb	Kaleb	Anastasia	Franklin
Drew Bennett	Cori Fulford	Ally McBrayer	Xavier Thomas	Sophie	Ashley	Marie
Lindsay Berry	Sina Fuxius	Amber McCroskey	Daniel Tolarchyk	Diego	Diego	Noah
Elsaine Blum	Aizalyn Garcia	Wyatt McCroskey	Eric Toy	Penny	Brian	Patrick
Damon Blum	Dayshaunarae Gass	Colleen Gaskins	Lucas Tucker	Alonbury	Dan	Butzbach
Xavier Bonney	Colleen Gaskins	Alex McFarlane	James Tyler	Elementary School	Ema	Elementary
William Bradley	Jacob Gomez	Erin McGuire	Liz Vasquez	Ms. Emery and Ms.	Franklin	Deanthony Baker
Evie Bradley	Christopher Gomez	Kelsey McMahon	Shane Wallace	Cindy's	Gaby	Savion Brown
Lara Bradley	Sierra Gooch	Kassey McMahon	Eve Walter	Quintan Bonner	Isaiah	Achille Castellano
Bobbie Breitwieser	Amanda Goodman	Antonio Metoyer	Anna Walter	Ira Bornstein	Kalani	Angela Castillo
Jacob Briney	Patrick Gough	Dwayne Metoyer	Catrina Wardman	Tyatianna Cutchin	Kayla	Abigail Doty
Nick Britt	Loren Grimes	Ryan Brophy	Shelbi Weaver	Joshua DeLoza	Makayla	Courtney Franz
Megan Brophy	Reed Gustafson	Jared Habel	Connor Murphy	Blake George	Michael	Jacob Garcia
Travis Brown	Ashley Hallmark	Daniel Harker	Chloe Harris	Kaeli Goodwin	Suzi	Kate Graham
Trish Brown	Chloe Harris	Aubrey Harris	Nicholas Harris	Omari Green	C.C. 1-63 AR	Henri Hanial
Manuel Brown	Lucas Heath	Amelia Heath	Whit Heiton	Quincy Wiggs	Germany	Faith LeeFlewers
Christian Brown	Ashlee Castillo	Luis Castillo	Angie Castillo	Kelsey Willis	Delize-Danielle	Samantha Lujan
Carson Brown	Brycen Helton	Taylor Hendricks	Primmera	Eric Willis	Byers	Katie Majorwitz
Alex Bub	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Robert Wyrick	Antonia Camara	Edgar Morant
Zech Burgess	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brittany Yost	Jeannetta Cortez	Kassidy Sherlock
Connor Burton	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Mckenzie Zangl	Ashley Cortez	Majowitz
Antonia Caffrey	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Michael Zangl	Jose Cortez	Aleyna Talley
Jordan Carter	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Paul Zielinski	Mackenzie Graham	Sarah Theurer
Ashlee Castillo	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Marina Zielinski	Christin Jenkins	Barnberg
Luis Castillo	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Anna Zielinski	Yasmin Jenkins	Elementary
Angie Castillo	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Mrs. Howell's class
Victoria Cavagna	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Jalen Reid
Austin Coughlin	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Isabella Carter
Alexander Combs	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Katie Eastman
Penelope Combs	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Daniel Walters
Haley Cook	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Ryan Buettner
Winsome Cooke	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Emmanuel Daigle
Romero Cooke	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Tyler Belcher
Daryl Copeland	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Janette Jackson
Aiden Covarrubias	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Jenna Haddix
Andrea Covarrubias	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Bence Mucci
Adrian Crabtree	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Nida Smith
Matthew Cross	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	Chaitin Barry
Cameron Dalton	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Jael Dalton	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Joseph Dalton, Jr.	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Will Dane	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Skyler Davidson	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Jeremy Diamond	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Shanea Dietel	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Ethan Dillon	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Drew Dillon	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Armando Dominguez	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Dominguez	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Sarah Dominguez	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Sarah Duncan	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Lily Duncan	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	
Katie Duncan	Brandon Hicks	Rocio Hidalgo	Julian Hill	Brandon Zipplies	Yasmin Jenkins	

Records: Guardsman killed Iraqi after sex

The Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — A National Guardsman who pleaded guilty to killing a 17-year-old Iraqi soldier said he shot the young man after they had consensual sex in a guard tower, a newspaper reported Saturday, citing court-martial records.

Pvt. Federico Daniel Merida,

21, pleaded guilty to murder without premeditation and other charges during a court-martial in Iraq in September.

Merida was sentenced Sept. 25 to 25 years in prison and reduced in rank and will be dishonorably discharged. He is being held at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., a Leavenworth spokeswoman said.

Merida, who was born in Ver-

acruz, Mexico, has a wife and toddler son.

Army officials at Forward Operating Base Danger, where the court-martial was held in Iraq, had previously withheld details of the case.

However, The News & Observer of Raleigh reported Saturday that records show Merida and the Iraqi were on guard duty May 11

in a tower on the perimeter of an Army camp near Tikrit in northern Iraq. At about 10:30 p.m., Merida shot the teen 11 times with his carbine.

Merida first told investigators the teen demanded money at gunpoint. Later, he said he killed the boy because he forced him to have sex. In a third interview, Merida said he got angry after the

two had consensual sex.

Merida also pleaded guilty to two counts of giving false statements.

Merida apologized to the victim's family during the court-martial, records show. "He was a son, a brother, someone very important to them," he said. "I took someone they loved and cared for."

Fla. father apologizes for torching van in grief

The Associated Press

HAIALEAH, Fla. — A man has apologized for setting fire to the van driven by a team of Marines who had come to his house to tell him his son was killed in Iraq.

"Thank God they opened their hearts to see me," Carlos Arredondo said after a private meeting with the Marines on Saturday at a Marine base in Haialeah, a Miami suburb.

Arredondo was celebrating his 44th birthday at his home in Hollywood on Aug. 25 and had his phone in his pocket, expecting a call from his son, Marine Lance Cpl. Alexander Arredondo.

But then three Marines, members of a military Casualty Assistance Calls team, arrived and told him his 20-year-old son had been killed in combat in Najaf, Iraq, during his second tour of duty in Iraq.

"I got very upset. I felt like it was a bad joke or bad dream," Arredondo said. "I was crying. ... I was calling for Alex."

Arredondo grabbed a propane torch and a gasoline can from his garage, yelled at the Marines to leave, smashed a window of their van with a hammer, poured gasoline in the vehicle and climbed inside.

As his mother tried to pull him out, he said, he accidentally turned on the torch.

The Marines put out the flames on his body. Jackson Memorial Hospital gave him an extended payment plan to pay his \$43,000 bill for burns that covered 26 percent of his body.

On Saturday, Arredondo and his wife, Melinda, met with Marine Maj. Scott Mack and the three Marines who went to his house. They discussed two scholarships in his son's name — one created by the Marines and the other by Blue Hills Regional Technical School in Canton, Mass., where the younger Arredondo graduated.

After the hourlong meeting, everyone stepped outside, and Arredondo saluted and embraced the Marines.

"Whatever happened out there wasn't about them," he said afterward. "I wanted them to understand I am very, very sorry."

After the fire, Mack had said the Marines would not press charges "out of compassion and sensitivity" to Arredondo.



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IN THE WORLD

EU talks have significant meaning for Turkey

Cyprus issue could block membership

BY JAMES C. HELICKE

The Associated Press

ISTANBUL, Turkey — The European Union's decision to extend membership talks with Turkey contributes to the Muslim country's stability and gives it a new position in Europe and the Islamic world, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul said Sunday.

The bloc on Friday agreed to start the membership talks with Turkey in October, but imposed tough conditions on Turkish membership, such as taking steps before the talks open in October.

"Turkey is a very different country than two days ago," Gul said in Ankara. "We sense this inside Turkey. You see this when we're together with all our neighbors. You see this in Europe. In all the Muslim countries, in Arab countries, in the Caucasus, Turkey's position has changed."

The EU made its decision despite widespread public misgivings in Europe about welcoming a poor and crowded Muslim nation into the bloc.

"The important issue is that Turkey's direction has become definite. Turkey has entered a period of permanent stability," Gul said.

Turkey still faces a number of challenges before it can become a full EU member, which EU officials

said isn't guaranteed and is unlikely for at least a decade. Turkey must, for example, broaden rights for ethnic and religious minorities and limit the military's influence in politics.

Before it can start the talks, Turkey also has to expand its customs union with the EU to include Cyprus, a move that EU officials say amounts to de facto recognition of its government.

Turkey has occupied the northern part of the divided island since 1974 and refuses to recognize the internationally recognized government in the south.

On Sunday, Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos indicated that Cyprus could still block Turkey's EU path if Turkey refuses to sign the customs union agreement by October.



Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, left, and Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul greet supporters Saturday in Ankara, Turkey.

Yukos' core unit sold to unknown Russian firm

BY ALEX NICHOLSON

The Associated Press

MOSCOW — A previously unknown Russian company called BaikafinansGroup bought the core production unit of oil giant Yukos at auction for \$9.3 billion on Sunday, gaining control of one of Russia's most prized oil assets for a fraction of what Yukos executives say it is worth.

The sale of the Yuganskneftegaz unit reduces Yukos to a shadow of its former self, one of the heaviest blows to a company which has been the target of a longtime government campaign. The government says it's trying to collect \$28 billion in back taxes — while Yukos officials say the Kremlin is punishing it for the politics of its now-jailed founder.

Yukos currently pumps nearly one-fifth of all of Russia's oil and supplies two percent of the world's consumption. The auctioned unit produced 60 percent of Yukos' output.

Foreign auditors have said the West Siberian unit was worth about \$18 billion, but only twice the \$9.3 billion it sold for.

Yukos executives said the unit was worth up to \$30 billion.

Virtually nothing is known about the winner, BaikafinansGroup, which emerged as a bidder at the last minute — after a U.S. court issued an injunction against the auction, disrupting plans for a bid from the company that had been seen as the Kremlin's favorite to snap up the unit: the state-controlled natural gas behemoth, Gazprom.

Observers, however, believe BaikafinansGroup could be just an alternative vehicle for Gazprom, with sources of funding that are different from those initially prepared.

Stephen Dashevsky, a leading analyst for Russia's Aton brokerage, said the winner was likely affiliated to Gazprom.

ITAR-Tass news agency claimed that BaikafinansGroup's registration address — in the central city of Yver — corresponded to that of one of Gazprom's structures.

Gazprom said Sunday that neither it nor Gazpromneft — its oil component, which was officially making the firm's bid — had any relation to the winner, the Interfax news agency reported.

Pinochet in hospital after stroke

The Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile — Former dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet has been hospitalized after suffering a stroke. It comes as an appeals court is determining whether to uphold his indictment and house arrest on human rights charges.

Pinochet was rushed to Santiago's Army Hospital on Saturday morning after "he felt bad during breakfast — as if he would faint," said his spokesman, retired Gen. Guillermo Garin.

Hospital officials, in a statement, said he suffered a stroke along with "impaired mobility and a neurological deficit."

Officials were not available for additional comment, but the statement said he is in stable condition and was expected to at least make a partial recovery.

Pinochet suffers from mild dementia, diabetes, arthritis and has a pacemaker. He has suffered several minor strokes in recent years and has been repeatedly hospitalized.

His hospitalization Saturday came a day after the Santiago Court of Appeals delayed until next week a decision on whether to uphold his indictment and house arrest for the alleged kidnapping of nine dissidents and the killing of one of them during his 1973-90 military regime.



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Al-Qaida shifting strategy in Saudi Arabia

BY CRAIG WHITLOCK
The Washington Post

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Al-Qaida forces in Saudi Arabia have shifted their strategy and are now almost exclusively searching for U.S. and other Western targets in the kingdom while avoiding attacks on domestic institutions in a bid to strengthen their flagging network, according to security officials and Saudi experts on radical groups.

While al-Qaida retains its primary goal of eventually toppling the Saudi royal family — as Osama bin Laden made clear in an audio recording released Thursday — an 18-month campaign of car bombings, gunbattles and kidnappings has failed to generate many new recruits and has resulted in a backlash among many Saudis, even those who otherwise are critical of the government, the officials and experts said.

More than 80 people have died

Terrorist network solely focusing on U.S., Western targets in bid to bolster organization, officials say

in the attacks, the majority of them Saudis or nonwestern immigrant workers. Many people in the kingdom are not only angry over the bloodshed but also fearful of al-Qaida's attempt to turn Saudi Arabia, a deeply conservative tribal society, into an even more conservative Islamic theocracy, several Saudi reformers said in interviews.

"People want government reforms and changes, but they are more scared of al-Qaida extremists," said Mansour Nougaidan, a former Islamic radical who has moderated his views but remains one of the most prominent critics of the Saudi government. "The common people — those people who thought their life might improve if the government changed — they are not ready to lose all

this for what some young teen-agers have in their minds as a utopia."

Despite this month's al-Qaida-sponsored attack from the U.S. consulate in Jeddah that left nine people dead, including the four assailants, Saudi government officials expressed confidence that they are steadily gaining the upper hand in their fight with the militants.

Security forces have arrested or killed 17 of the 26 most wanted militant leaders in the country. Two others on the most wanted list are believed to be dead or badly injured, while a key operational planner reportedly fled the kingdom, Saudi security officials said.

Saudi officials said they've dismantled three of four known

al-Qaida cells and the insurgents are finding it harder to obtain ammunition, weaponry and money. The attacks' size and scope have also dwindled since last year, when car bombs in Riyadh blew up two Western residential compounds and caused more than 200 casualties.

"The people who are still there are not as skillful as the ones who were there in the beginning," said Brig. Gen. Mansour Turki, spokesman for the Saudi Interior Ministry. "We feel more confident than we did in the beginning of this fight. We thought it would take much longer to be in control. We cannot deny that there are still possibilities that the terrorists could execute more acts, but they are not as strong as they were a year ago."

Still, few people are predicting the attacks will end any time soon.

"The hands-on folks see this as a serious engagement that has some time to run," said a Western official involved in counterterrorism efforts in the kingdom, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "They don't see this as ending near term. It's going to take a period of time. Is it months? Is it years? We don't know."

For the moment, al-Qaida is seeking to recover from the loss of leaders who have been arrested or killed. Abdulaziz Muqrin, a former cell leader who asserted responsibility in the deaths of three U.S. military contractors last summer, including the head of Lockheed Martin employee Paul Johnson Jr., died in a June shootout with Saudi police. Muqrin's replacement, Saleh Awli, is believed to be dead or seriously injured, Saudi officials said.

Yushchenko continues campaign



Ukrainian presidential candidate and opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko holds traditional Ukrainian bread as he walks with daughter Khrysina during the St. Nicholas Day celebration on the main square of Ukrainian capital Kiev. Over the weekend, Yushchenko and Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, the country's rival presidential candidates, made overlapping campaign trips to the eastern industrial city of Kharkiv on Friday, sparking fears of more tension ahead of the Dec. 26 rerun election.

Security issues raised in France after gruesome hospital killings

The Associated Press

PARIS — France's health minister called an urgent meeting Sunday to address security at hospitals after the gruesome killings of two psychiatric hospital workers that have shaken the country.

Philippe Douste-Blazy was to meet with health workers and Interior Ministry officials after the discovery Saturday of the bodies of a nurse and a nurse's aide — one beheaded, the other with the throat slit — at a hospital in the southwestern town of Pau.

Five people, including a recent patient whom state prosecutors believe to be the key suspect, remained in police custody Sunday for questioning, police said.

The bodies were found around daybreak Saturday in a building in the geriatric ward of the hospital, where a shattered window pointed to a possible break-in, state prosecutor Eric Maurel said.

Officials said one woman's head was found on top of a TV set at the hospital.

A man who sounded drunk telephoned police overnight with "information about a violent scenario," Maurel said Saturday. The man and three others also at his home were among those taken into custody.

Union leaders faulted a staff and funding shortage funding, saying security has been a problem for months, dozens of jobs

were set to be cut, and violence took place regularly at the hospital.

It is horror, terror, fear, disgust — fear of returning to work," Cathy Sanders, a regional official from Worker's Front union, told RTL radio. "Last night, the staff was doubled" as a precaution, Sanders said.

The meeting called by Douste-Blazy was to focus on ways to combat violence and boost security at hospitals, a statement from the Health Ministry said.

The minister announced last week that he planned to present by March a mental health reform package for the country, which he said lags behind others in psychiatric treatment.

Joke text message triggers alert

CANBERRA, Australia — An Italian tourist on a flight from Sydney to Vienna caused a security alert when he sent a cell phone message to his wife claiming his plane had been hijacked by terrorists, the Australian government said Sunday.

Authorities quickly discovered the message was a hoax.

Antonio Casale, 35, sent the text message when the Lauda Air flight stopped in Kuala Lumpur to refuel, a newspaper in Sydney reported Sunday.

A Transport Ministry spokesman confirmed the report in the Sunday Telegraph.

Casale claimed terrorists were in control of the plane and were taking the passengers to an unknown destination.

His distressed wife contacted Italian police, who immediately contacted the Italian Embassy in Canberra, who in turn contacted Australian police.

Fire breaks out on Italian ferry

ROME — A small fire broke out on a ferry carrying hundreds of people from Sicily to the Italian mainland, and the boat was towed back to port on Sunday to be evacuated, a port authority official said.

No one was seriously injured on board the ferry Florio, although many passengers fell ill from the smoke, a Palermo port official said. Some passengers required hospital treatment, Sky TG24 television reported.

All 472 people on board were safely evacuated when the boat reached Palermo, Sicily, the official said. Some disoriented, ailing passengers had to be carried off the boat or burst into tears when they reached land. Passengers spent the night on a picnic, with the ferry tossing on rough seas, smoke filling the air and no electricity on board.

Turkmenistan parliament elections

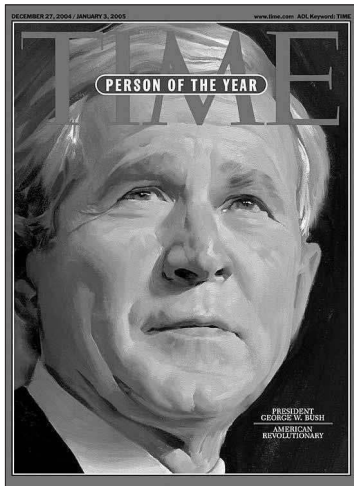
ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan — Polling stations were nearly empty early on election day Sunday in the capital of Turkmenistan, a tightly controlled former Soviet republic. Election officials said they may carry ballot boxes door-to-door to seek votes.

At least 50 percent of the country's 3 million eligible voters must take part for the parliamentary elections to be valid.

The 131 candidates contesting 50 seats represent different public organizations such as trade unions and women's associations.

From The Associated Press

IN THE STATES



Time magazine chose President Bush as its 2004 Person of the Year.

His Time: Bush selected 2004 Person of the Year

BY SAM DOLNICK
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — After winning re-election and "reshaping the roles of politics to fit his 10-gallon leadership style," President George W. Bush for the second time was chosen as Time magazine's Person of the Year.

The magazine's editors tapped Bush "for sharpening the debate until the choices bleed, for reframing reality to match his design, for gambling his fortunes — and ours — on his faith in the power of leadership."

Time's 2004 Person of the Year package, on newsstands Monday, includes an Oval Office interview with Bush, an interview with his father, former President George H. W. Bush, and a profile of Bush's chief political adviser, Karl Rove.

In an interview with the magazine, Bush attributed his victory over Democratic candidate John Kerry to his foreign policy and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. "The election was about the use of American influence," Bush said.

After a grueling campaign,

Bush remains a polarizing figure in America and around the world, and that's part of the reason he earned the magazine's honor, said Managing Editor Jim Kelly.

"Many, many Americans deeply wish he had not won," Kelly said in a telephone interview. "And yet he did."

In the Time article, Bush said he relishes that some people dislike him.

"I think the natural instinct for most people in the political world is that they want people to like them," Bush said. "On the other hand, I think sometimes I take kind of a delight in who the critics are."

Bush joins six other presidents who have twice won the magazine's top honor: Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower (first as a general), Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton.

Kelly said other candidates included Michael Moore and Mel Gibson, "because in different ways their movies tapped in to deep cultural streams," and political strategist Rove, who is widely credited with engineering Bush's win.

Poll: Judging Buses

NEW YORK — President Bush won re-election, unlike his father, but lags behind the elder Bush in the public's view of several personal attributes, according to a Time poll.

The poll examined public views of President George W. Bush compared with those of the first President George Bush on attributes:

■ **Honest and trustworthy:** The former president, by 37 percent to 19 percent.

■ **Understands the issues:** The former president, by 43 percent to 25 percent.

■ **Likable:** The former president, by 38 percent to 28 percent.

■ **Sticks to positions, even if unpopular:** The current president, by 56 percent to 16 percent.

The Time-SRBI poll of 1,009 adults was taken Dec. 13-14 and has a margin of sampling error of 3 percentage points.

From The Associated Press

Republican Senators at odds over Rumsfeld's future

BY GENARO C. ARMAS
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Acknowledging mistakes in Iraq by the Bush administration, leading Republicans expressed reluctance Sunday that the White House replace Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, who has lost the confidence of some GOP lawmakers over the conduct of the war.

The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee said a change at the top of the Pentagon would be too disruptive, given the elections scheduled in Iraq for Jan. 30. Sen. John Warner, R-Va., also said the administration was addressing the mistakes that have occurred in the aftermath of the U.S.-led ouster of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

"We should not at this point in time entertain any idea of changing those responsibilities in the Pentagon," Warner told NBC's "Meet the Press."



Sen. Richard Lugar, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, added, "We really can't go through that ordeal" now of finding a successor. Rumsfeld "should be held accountable and he should stay in office," said Lugar, R-Ind.



Rumsfeld

But Sen. Chuck Hagel, a Vietnam veteran, said he had "no confidence" in Rumsfeld. Hagel, R-Neb.,

did not say that Rumsfeld should step down.

"I find it astounding... Things are worse than they've ever been" in Iraq, Hagel told CBS' "Face the Nation." Hagel said the decision to replace Rumsfeld was Bush's.

More than 1,300 American troops have died since the war began in March 2003. On Sunday, car bombs rocked Iraq's two holiest Shiite cities, killing at least 60 people and wounding more than 120. In Baghdad, the capital, dozens of gunmen killed three Iraqi employees of the organization running next month's elections.

U.S. troops in Kuwait have complained to Rumsfeld about long deployments and a lack of armored vehicles and other equipment.

Rumsfeld, who agreed to Bush's request earlier this month to remain in the Cabinet during the president's second term, won a vote of confidence from the White House on Sunday.

"Secretary Rumsfeld is doing a spectacular job," the president's chief of staff, Andrew Card, told



Hagel

ABC's "This Week."

"The president has provided good direction for our military, and Secretary Rumsfeld is transforming our military to meet the threats of the 21st century," Card said.

While security remains a concern in Iraq, Card said the growing economy and



Warner

Lawmakers criticize secretary for machine-signed condolence letters

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Last week, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced he would personally sign condolence letters to the family members of U.S. troops killed in action rather than letting a machine affix his signature.

Republican and Democratic members of Congress criticized the embattled Pentagon chief on Sunday for not signing the letters himself all along.

"My goodness, that's the least that we could expect of the secretary of defense, is having some personal attention paid by him," said Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., noting that President Bush signs such letters himself.

"If the president of the United States can find time to do that, why can't the Secretary of Defense? Hagel, a Vietnam veteran, asked on CBS' "Face the Nation."

In a statement Friday, Rumsfeld announced the change in policy and said

more than 1,000 condolence letters had gone out to relatives of Americans killed in military action during the global fight against terrorism.

"While I have not individually signed each one, in the interest of ensuring expeditious contact with grieving family members, I have directed that in the future I sign each letter," Rumsfeld said in the statement.

The statement, which was reported Friday by Stars and Stripes, did not specifically refer to troops killed in Iraq, though family members of soldiers who died there told Stripes they were angry with Rumsfeld's apparent stamped signature. More than 1,300 American troops have died since the war began in March 2003.

Messages left with the Pentagon about the criticism from lawmakers were not immediately returned Sunday.

The signature flap was the latest in a string of criticism in recent weeks of the defense secretary's handling of the war in Iraq.

should make a change at the Pentagon in the next year or so.

But Warner said Bush should stay the course, especially with the Iraqi vote next month.

"We are going to have a tough period after that election and we should press our confidence in the commander in chief and his principal subordinate," Warner said. "And he will fight to get those budgets, and he will earn the confidence of the people in the Senate and the House so that he can continue to do that which is best for the country."

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Barbaric killings not justified

It is how the letter writer justifies the killing of an enemy that scares the living heck out of many of us who proudly wear the uniform of one of the services of the United States ("No tears shed for insurgent," Dec. 3).

Absolutely nothing justifies such killings. It appears that our society, of which the military is just a reflection, can justify any barbarous act that seems to be a part of this war. Just because the other side does it does not mean we have to sink to their level.

What was we liberated for Iraq? Do we want those we tried to free in democracy experience it to be no better than the vicious system under Saddam Hussein? By that killing, we created more terrorists who will seek revenge on the United States a generation from now.

If you could ask the British of the 18th century what they thought of our Revolutionary War tactics, they would have called it barbarous and they would have labeled us as terrorists. In this war, we have an "honorable" thing where men met on a designated battlefield in bright uniforms, standing face to face and walking toward each other as they shot at each other.

American rebels, however, learned many of our tactics from the American Indians. These tactics included hiding behind trees and dressing in drab colors, as well as ambushing the marching redcoats.

Don't be ashamed of your forefathers. Their "primitive and barbarous" tactics caused us to win and create the greatest country in the world. We should not forget our roots when dealing with other nations.

U.S. Air Force Maj. (ret.) Klaus-D. Paul
Kaiserslautern, Germany

Angry, sad over front page

Has the fact that my brothers and sisters in arms are being killed almost daily become so routine that the front page of the Dec. 14 Midwest edition had "Seven Marines killed in weekend battles" ("7 Marines killed in weekend Iraq battles," Europe edition) and then half of the cover was filled with pictures of the NFL playoffs?

That not only infuriates me, it saddens me. Seven proud Americans paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of their country and in a fight to free the sovereign nation of Iraq from the insurgency that plagues it. Marines die, that's a fact we accept. We've fought wars in every climate and place for more than 229 years. Countless Marines have paid this price so Americans' basic rights are protected.

Strokes don't dishonor my brothers like this. The Corps is small and we are a very protective family. When you dishonor one of us, you dishonor us all.

The playoffs are very exciting for us. Sports scores are a big morale booster,

Tell us what you think

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but there is a time and a place for things. A cover like this one I can accept from a liberal media outlet, but Stars and Stripes is supposed to be for us.

Marine Sgt. Salju K. Thomas
Baghdad

Sherps are up to the task

I applaud the Air Force decision to increase its cargo flying within this theater ("Dangers on ground in Iraq lead to increase aircraft use," Dec. 13, Midwest edition).

However, I must illuminate another small, relatively unknown fact. The Army's Cargo Airplane Initiative is well under way. It would place larger, more-capable cargo airplanes within the theater to support its internal theater airlift requirements.

This fact does not sit well with our Air Force brethren. The Army's only cargo fixed wing currently is the C-23 Sherpa. For two years now Sherpas have been flying out of Kuwait and this last year solely out of Balad Air Base, Iraq.

Numerous times we have completed missions that the Air Force would not. Hours flown, missions, cargo transported and personnel carried are classified, but I can tell you that the numbers are record-setting for our mission. The majority of these missions are to austere airports and runways the Air Force initially (and some even now) deemed unusable for its aircraft.

The Army does indeed have a valid need for its own increased intra-theater airlift, and the Army needs to manage it in order to continue the valued support to troops in the field. It is my fervent hope the Air Force realizes this.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 David P. Smith
Logistics Support Area Anacoda, Iraq

Award shouldn't resemble CIB

Whatever is decided on awarding other military occupational specialties a badge or ribbon of some sort, it should

not resemble in any way the Combat Infantryman Badge ("Alternative to Army badge," letter, Nov. 12).

Sure, the battlefield has changed and we find certain specialties close, in view or even in the battle, but the infantry is always "in" first, and always will be.

I, being an 11B (infantryman), know they do take part in the action sometimes to support us. But we are always there to implement medical aid when our fear-less combat medic is alongside another squad. We are alone to conduct our battles to the best of our ability, "man up" in the face of death, while we treat our wounded, conduct radio ops, breach the obstacles and search for roadside bombs and vehicle-borne bombs.

We like to keep ourselves separated from the rest of the Army because, well, we are. A combat patch is already given to any MOS who has been in a combat zone. If they want recognition as being in combat, first we as 11B should acknowledge it, then recommend it. Anyone who has enough to face an enemy machine gun and fires back, risking what the infantry does every day, deserves credit. But we don't give the Medal of Honor to every infantryman who is killed in action.

Whatever is decided for those who fired back during contact should not mimic the traditions and awards given to those who have endured the hardships and training of our most beloved soldier, the infantryman.

Pfc. Kevin Holt
Camp Habaniyah, Iraq

How to support troops

Many times we take things for granted. Having friends and family over for the holidays, sharing a big meal, being able to go shopping, etc., are all of the good things we have here.

We have thousands of men and women around the world giving their all for this freedom; men and women who are away from home, family and friends who need to know they are loved and missed, and most of all that they have our support and respect for serving our country. A country that has a huge debt. A country not Democratic or Republican. A country that stands proud of our military men and women who honor us every day by serving in the armed forces.

So, what can we do to show them our appreciation?

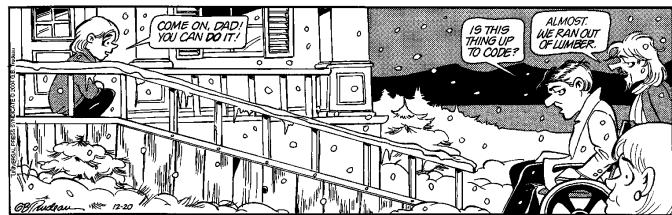
Contact people. Get everyone to write letters, send cards, send small gifts or any care packages. Contact the United Service Organizations for information on how to help.

Contact the local television and radio stations and ask them to help. Go out and buy a support ribbon for your car. Fly our flag high.

I for one, am going to let our men and women know that they are missed, loved and honored.

Bob Dillon
Winters, Calif.

BY GARRY TRUDEAU



OPINION

The nuance of necessary deception in war

Can reporters be trusted with war information? Can the government be trusted? We're still finding out — or maybe we're not finding out. One of the great successes of World War II was Operation Fortitude, aimed at cloak-

James Pinkerton



ing the D-Day invasion in a "bodyguard of lies." The Allies wished to convince the Germans that the assault across the English Channel would land near the town of Pas de Calais, at the Channel's narrowest point.

So the Allies created a phantom army, with inflatable rubber tanks and paper-mâché airplanes. To further the illusion, they created a fake navy, too, and put out faux radio transmissions. Meanwhile, the real assault armies were assembling farther south. And on the morning of June 6, 1944, the Allies landed at Normandy, 200 miles from Calais.

Not only was the Normandy coast lightly defended, but the Germans were not convinced that the "real" attack was coming at Calais. By the time they figured out the deception, it was too late.

Not only was the Normandy coast lightly defended, but the Germans were not convinced that the "real" attack was coming at Calais. By the time they figured out the deception, it was too late.

So to the obvious question: Could any thing so sneaky as Operation Fortitude be

pulled off today? Could thousands of people be kept quiet in a world full of cell phones, e-mail and text-messaging, all interfacing with an ever-proliferating number of cable news channels, bloggers and list-servers? Which is to say, in other words, that "the media" today aren't just a few reporters who might be pep-talked or intimidated into keeping a secret. Instead, the media include millions of people representing different traditions, different countries, different loyalties. Could such a buzzing collectivity even begin to keep a secret? The United States is hardly helpless. American forces deposed Saddam Hussein in just three weeks of fighting last year.

Yet on the other hand, the larger objectives in the "global war on terror" — defeating the insurgents, democratizing Iraq, winning hearts and minds across the Middle East — remain to be achieved. And it's apparent that reports and images from Iraq, most notably the Abu Ghraib prison photos and the video of the Marine shooting a wounded man in Fallujah, aren't helping the American cause.

It's not so much that the media are untrustworthy — although many in the military might argue that they are — it's that the "press" from Al-Jazeera reporters to the humblest freelancer, is simply uncontrollable. And absent an enormous paradigm shift, that's not going to change.

But now, the military is preparing just such a paradigm shift. On Dec. 1, the Los Angeles Times revealed that in September the Pentagon had established a "strategic communications office" to wage information — or disinformation — warfare in Iraq. The Times reported that an Oct. 14 an-



Courtesy of Signal Corps

With Operation Fortitude in motion, U.S. assault troops huddle behind the protective front of their landing craft as it nears a beachhead on the northern coast of France on Dec. 19, 1944.

nouncement by the Marines of a seeming attack on Fallujah, carried on CNN, was, in fact, a fake-out of the enemy.

It's hard to argue against deceiving the enemy in wartime, but it must also be noted that such deceptions are soon covered by the media, which is to say, uncovered.

Of course, it's possible that the military has launched a hundred other Fortitude-like fakes that have gone unreported. But now we know — or we think we know — that the Pentagon plans to create a "director of central information" to codify "strategic information." That new Pen-

tagon post is not to be confused with the "national intelligence director," the new slot created to oversee the CIA and other spy outfits — one thinks.

But now that the directorate of information has been revealed, what does that revelation do to the American government's credibility? Is it really a good idea to have, in effect, a Ministry of Deception if its existence is known to the world? In the future, it might be harder for the enemy to know what's going on, and that's good. But it will surely be harder for Americans to know what's going on, and that's not so good.

James Pinkerton is a Newsday columnist.

GIs also suffer wounds that medicine can't heal

BY ROBERT CORNEJO

"Doesn't it figure that a second lieutenant got shot?" I overheard a noncommissioned officer say to his buddy. It was the afternoon of Dec. 20, 1989, and I was being evacuated to a military hospital in Panama on board a troop-carrying special operations helicopter.

It was 15 years ago that I was wounded on the first day of Operation Just Cause, the U.S. invasion of Panama. Since that day, I haven't often recounted my experience to others, and I mention Panama now not to celebrate that war but to bring attention to those who return home wounded from Iraq or Afghanistan. Our soldiers today are trained to do everything that the military asks of them in combat except maybe two things: come home wounded from war and deal with life afterward.

As a young field artillery officer, I was part of the first wave of the 82nd Airborne task force that parachuted into Torrijos International Airport near Panama City at 2 a.m. on Dec. 20. Our mission was to assemble around the howitzers that had been air-dropped onto the airport ahead of us. After I met up with my unit and our guns, we were ordered to move from the airfield to a forward firing position to provide support for an infantry assault against the Panamanian Defense Forces.

Around noon our convoy of two howitzers, several trucks and a light tank departed the relative safety of the secure airport. To get our guns to the planned firing position near the Pacora River, our heavily armed group drove through the village of Cayaba. A couple of blocks short of the north end of town, when dressed in civilian clothes and driving a small white car ambushed us with gunfire and grenades in a drive-by shooting. As the attackers accelerated through our halted

convoy, we returned fire. I slid off my truck, got into a prone position in the street and fired a few rounds at the ambushers. Then I was hit. I felt a sharp, stinging pain in my right hip, and my leg stiffened in a muscle spasm. A noncommissioned officer riding in the truck picked me up, and the convoy quickly moved out.

I had been shot by an M-16 bullet — most likely friendly fire that ricocheted off the street during the brief firefight, which had lasted at most a minute. Both Panamanians in the car were dead. Two of us were wounded.

Twenty-four hours later, I was back in the United States in a hospital bed at San Antonio's Brooke Army Medical Center. In the next few days, I underwent surgery on my wound and was transferred back to my home state at Fort Bragg, N.C. While I should have been happy to be recovering well, I wasn't. Instead, I was embarrassed

when I called my father in Virginia to tell him that I had been deployed to Panama and had returned to the States wounded.

On Christmas Day I watched TV coverage of the Panama invasion and began to replay the minute-long firefight in my mind over and over. I blamed myself for getting off the truck and onto the street. I was angry at myself for becoming the stereotypical lieutenant who gets himself wounded during his first combat experience. I wondered if I had failed my men by departing the battle early. I asked "what if?" again and again.

I am not in a position to speak for the wounded veterans of today. I can only assume that some of our current war wounded experience feelings similar to mine. I believe that most of these men and women are not ready to share their combat experience with others, as I do now. For a time, they may choose to deliberate on that moment they were wounded. For me, this routine con-

tinued for the better part of a year, until life's other concerns eventually displaced my internal debate.

The anniversary of the Panama invasion elicits personal memories for me. Others will have similar memories as they think back to the day they were wounded in Iraq or Afghanistan. Many of today's combat wounded will not be as lucky as I was, but will suffer permanent disability resulting from the devastating effect of modern insurgent weapons.

I don't think our military can ever train soldiers to prepare for coming home wounded or for dealing with life afterward. But I do think that we as Americans should keep in mind that most wounded veterans don't want unnecessary or extraordinary attention. What they are more likely to want is privacy and understanding while they come to grips with the moment they were hit.

Robert Cornejo is a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army. This column first appeared in The Washington Post.

Mallard Fillmore

BY BRUCE TINSLEY



Free holiday sign

LA HOUMA — Some people wanted to know why "Season's Greetings" adorned the Terrebonne Parish Government Tower, instead of "Merry Christmas."

It turns out the decision had nothing to do with religion or political correctness.

The sign was free. Parish council members said that if someone donates a "Merry Christmas" sign, it will go up, also. The "Season's Greetings" sign was donated to the parish by the Terrebonne General Medical Center a few years ago.

Holiday lights Web cam

CO LAFAYETTE — After festooning his house with 17,000 Christmas lights, Alex Komarnitsky wanted more than just passers-by to enjoy the spectacle. He got his holiday wish. His interactive Web site allowed Internet users to turn the lights on and off with the click of a mouse at attracting thousands.

Another Web site recently alerted users about his interactive page. "It said, 'This guy's Web site is funny. Turn the lights on and off and annoy the neighbors,'" Komarnitsky said.

This month alone, more than 1.3 million Internet browsers — including about 38,000 from a German domain — have visited the site.

Prison for abuser

MA NORTHAMPTON — A Huntington man was sentenced to serve nine to 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to breaking into his estranged wife's home and ambushing her when she returned from a court hearing that extended a restraining order against him.

Police said Donald G. Cornelius Jr., 47, hid in the basement until his wife came home from the courthouse, and then attacked her with a metal bar from an exercise machine.

Kimberly Anderson told the judge at the sentencing that when she is home alone, she still imagines the sound of his steps on the stairs.

Her nose was broken, she underwent several operations to repair her face, and she lost most of the hearing in one ear in the attack.

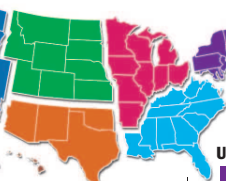
Drug test complaint

TX SAN ANTONIO — A fired drug screener was free on bond after he was accused of having sex with a woman in exchange for a false report that there were no signs of drugs in her urine.

Adrian Barrientos was released by U.S. Magistrate Judge Nancy Novak on a \$25,000 unsecured bond. Barrientos, 29, faces a charge of obstruction of justice, which carries a possible penalty of up to 10 years in federal prison.

Barrientos, formerly employed by a company that drug-tests convicted offenders, was accused by an FBI agent in a criminal complaint of misdeeds involving a female supervised offender who used cocaine this summer.

The complaint stated that Barrientos asked the woman if her urine would test positive. After she answered "yes," Barrientos told her



AMERICAN ROUNDUP

that he would falsely report on her drug-test form that her urine tested negative in exchange for sex, the complaint said.

Hefty donation

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A prosperous businessman didn't think he was entitled to his 2004 Social Security payments, so he became an early Santa Claus for the Salvation Army.

The man dropped a check for \$14,845 into a bell ringer's red kettle outside a bookstore in downtown Minneapolis.

The man, who declined to be identified, released a written statement through Salvation Army spokeswoman Annette Bauer, who had sought out the man for an explanation.

He said he will receive \$20,295 in Social Security payments in 2004 and didn't really need it because "I have considerable income now and should continue to have considerable income if I ever do retire."

Band to play for Bush

NV RENO — The McQueen High School band will finally get its chance to perform for President Bush. The Presidential Inaugural Committee chose the Reno school to represent Nevada in the Jan. 20 Inauguration Day parade in Washington.



It takes teamwork

Although the wind was a little calmer, it was still strong enough to make it difficult for Wilson Elementary School fifth-graders Brian Ladwig, Ryan Sager and Brian Jun as they take down the Wisconsin and American flags after school in Beaver Dam, Wis.

Two months ago, the band was barred from performing at a Reno campaign rally attended by Bush. A school district policy prohibits school-sponsored organizations from engaging in party politics.

Unpaid wages inquiry

NY ALBANY — Owners of a diner have agreed to pay \$76,000 to end an investigation into whether they failed to pay workers minimum wage and overtime in a case both sides expect will be repeated elsewhere in the state.

The Front Page Diner on Staten Island settled with state Attorney General Eliot J. Spitzer's investigation without admitting guilt, according to a Spitzer spokesman and the diner's attorney.

Spitzer accused the diner's owners of paying wages as low as \$2.25 an hour to wait staff between August 1999 and August 2004.

The minimum wage for restaurant workers accepting tips is \$3.30 an hour, while the minimum hourly wage for other workers is \$5.15.

Assistant attorneys general Michael Higgins and James Versocki also said the diner paid no overtime to cooks, busboys, and dishwashers despite work weeks up to 60 hours.

The diner's payroll process will be subject to monitoring and help in contacting workers and former workers to collect from the settlement, according to the agreement.

School shelves bonuses

CO GREELEY — The University of Northern Colorado shelved plans to award \$189,000 in bonuses to administrators next year after an angry backlash from faculty members who haven't gotten a merit raise in two years.

Faculty got a one-time payment equaling 2 percent of their salaries in June while nine administrators received \$103,000 in bonuses. UNC President Kay Norton suspended next year's bonus for administrators and promised a campus-wide discussion of compensation.

Slaying probe closed

AL BEAUREGARD — Prosecutors closed an investigation into a triple slaying by presenting to a grand jury circumstantial evidence found in a suicide note.

Bernard Vaughan, 69, shot himself two days after the March 26 shooting deaths of three men on his property. The note made reference to post-traumatic stress disorder, a result of his military service, and mentioned the "turmoil of the last 24 hours," Sheriff Jay Jones said.

Record farmland values

IA AMES — The value of Iowa farmland has hit an all-time high. An annual survey by Iowa State University shows that farmland values jumped 15.6 percent this year, hitting a record \$2,629.

That's an average increase of \$354 an acre. Scott County's average price was \$4,167 dollars an acre, the first time the average price of farmland in Iowa topped \$4,000.



Sweet holiday treat

A 1,150 pound polar bear at SeaWorld San Diego's Wild Arctic attraction licks to a gingerbread man before devouring the tasty treat.



Blue reindeer

Bruce Aiken Elementary kindergarten student Mighuel Perez is not too excited to be singing Christmas carols at the Sunrise Mall in Brownsville, Texas.



Taking a break
A man relaxes in the warmth of the sun during the noon hour at a plaza in downtown Los Angeles. Last week temperatures hovered around the 80-degree mark under clear skies.



Balancing act
Dancers Jeffrey Kazin, foreground, Amber Sloan, left background, David Parker, center, and Emily Tschiffel pose from Parker's "Nut/Cracked" in a New York studio. Parker and his Bang Group performed the piece at the Dance Theater Workshop in New York.



Who goes there?
A young snowy owl perches on an insulator atop a power pole along near Somers, Mont.



Rays of light
The Creekmore Holiday Express rolls through the tunnel of lights in this long exposure at Creekmore Park's decoration of lights in Fort Smith, Ark.

Burglar facing hard time

NJ NEW BRUNSWICK — A burglar who broke into more than 100 homes in five counties and stole \$2 million to support his casino gambling habit faces a long prison term.

Samuel Krosky, 44, could get 25 years in prison when he's sentenced April 1. As part of a plea agreement with prosecutors, Krosky is required to make restitution to his victims.

'Predator' to stay in jail

VA PORTSMOUTH — A circuit judge ruled that Roy Young Jr., 32, who is serving a six-year sentence for molesting two girls, is a "sexually violent predator" and will remain in state custody even after his term is completed. A state law passed in 2003 allows sex offenders to be held if it is proved that they're likely to commit similar acts.

Union contracts OK'd

MI LANSING — The State Civil Service Commission approved pay contracts for unionized state workers and set pay levels for others not covered by union contracts. The agreements include pay increases of 10 percent spread over three years. As a concession to save the state money, most workers will receive 38 hours of pay for 40-hour work weeks from January until next November.

Waste ink dumping

CA SAN FRANCISCO — An Oakland newspaper publishing company and two men have been charged with crimes for allegedly dumping hundreds of gallons of waste ink in a vacant lot in San Francisco.

Alameda Publishing Corp., which publishes the San Francisco Post, the Richmond Post and the Berkeley Tri-City Post as well as the Spanish-language El Mundo, was charged with felony dumping violations that could result in millions of dollars in fines.

The company has already paid the \$9,000 to clean up the site.

The company's plant manager, Victor Martinez, 61, has been arrested along with William Araujo, 50. Both are charged with illegal transportation and disposal of hazardous waste and could be sentenced to three years in state prison if convicted.

Glass tower planned

DE WILMINGTON — A developer announced plans to build a \$65 million, 18-story glass office tower in Wilmington. The tower to be built by the Buccini-Pollin Group is the third speculative downtown office building to be announced this year. An office tower without a lead tenant hasn't been erected in downtown Wilmington for more than 10 years.

Permits for strippers

TX SAN ANTONIO — The City Council on Friday approved a measure that will require strippers to wear permits while they are on stage.

City Councilman Chip Haass pushed the amended human display ordinance as making it easier for police to identify dancers.

But a lawyer representing sever-

al strip clubs in the city said it would also create a physical danger by making it easier for an obsessed customer to find out a dancer's real name and where she lives. Attorney Jim Deegear has said he will file a lawsuit challenging the measure, which the 11-member council passed unanimously early Friday during a marathon meeting that began Thursday afternoon.

Deegear says the city's strict rules are part of an effort to drive his clients out of business.

Llama mistaken for deer

WI MADISON — A hunter faces two charges after shooting a llama that he mistook for a deer.

John M. Burger was charged with trespassing and a misdemeanor or count of misreatment of animals after he killed a llama named Snicker Doodle Silk that was grazing on land owned by Susan and Kevin Kovacs.

According to a criminal complaint, Burger was on land adjacent to the Kovacs' property when he shot the animal Nov. 9.

Burger told a Dane County sheriff's deputy he was in a tree stand when he spotted an animal grazing about 60 yards north.

Burger said he thought the animal was a deer, probably a doe, and he waited for it to raise its head. It did not and he shot at it. He then walked toward the animal and saw herds of llamas running around, realizing his mistake.

Burger reported the accidental shooting to the Kovacs family and apologized.

The trespassing charge carries a fine of up to \$1,000 and the other count carries a fine of up to \$10,000 and a nine-month jail term.

Internet while camping

TX AUSTIN — Campers at five state parks will soon be able to check e-mail or browse the Internet. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department announced a pilot program to offer high-speed wireless Internet service at Choke Canyon, Blanco, Balmorhea, Goose Island and Ray Roberts Lake state parks starting Jan. 1.

Security funding cut

TN MEMPHIS — U.S. Rep. Harold Ford has asked Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge in a letter why Memphis' homeland security funding has been cut from \$8.2 million to nothing.

Ford indicated that the threat of terror still exists in the city — a major distribution hub with one of the busiest cargo airports in the world. The cut will affect funding for first responders.

Mining project begins

NV BATTLE MOUNTAIN — Newmont Mining Corp. began construction on the controversial Phoenix gold mine site where copper and gold have been mined for almost 150 years.

The \$200 million project near Battle Mountain raised concerns over acid rock drainage and long-term effects on nearby water. A federal review found actions by Newmont will minimize environmental risks.

Stories and photos from wire services

AFRTS Television Schedule

Updated sports listings are available on the first Scoreboard page in the sports section or AFN's Web site at <http://myafn.dodmedia.osd.mil>

MONDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2004

AFN-FAMILY		AFN-MOVIE		AFN-EUROPE		AFN-KOREA		AFN-NEWS		AFN-SPORTS		SPECTRUM		AFN-PACIFIC	
9:00	The Wild Thornberrys	Mov 5 ** "Auntie to Danger" (1996, Supergo) Tol	Dr. Phil	Jeopardy!	The Betty White Show	SportsCenter	30-Minute Meals	Jeopardy!							
9:30	The Wild Thornberrys	Spelling, Michael Grosse			Headline News										
10:00	ChaZkZone (E)		(9-48) Oprah Winfrey	ESPN News	Bulls and Bears	Designers' Challenge	ESPN News								
10:30	ChaZkZone (E)	(1-45) Movie **** "The King of Kings" (1957, Comedy-Drama) Paul Newman, Robert Redford Two Depression-era men plot to desecrate a crime lord who is about to settle a crime lord.	(35) Guiding Light	Advisory Block	Cable on Business	Fashion Emergency	Headline News								
11:00	Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius		(17) General Hospital	60 Minutes	Dateline NBC	The Soup	60 Minutes								
11:30	Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius		Headline News	Without a Trace "Copy Cat"		The King of Queens									
12:00	Kim Possible "Sink or Swim"		Judge Judy			Girlfriends "Viva Las Vegas"									
12:30	Planet's Funniest Animals	Mov 5 ** "Sliding Doors" (2001, Comedy) Gwyneth Paltrow, Hugh Grant A train's sliding doors trigger a woman's fantasy life.	Today Sportsman Weaver; Chess talk, fitness tips.	2:30-6:00AM - 7:00AM	Fox and Friends	College Basketball North Carolina at Virginia Tech. (Taped)	Charm'd "The Importance of Being Phoebe"	24 Day 3: 6:00AM - 7:00AM							
13:00	Mov 5 ** "Lassie & A New Generation" (1984, Adventure) Thomas Guay, Helen Slater.		Pacific Report	The Tonight Show	Fox and Friends										
14:00	Funniest Home Videos	2:50 Movie **** "A River Runs Through It" (1982, Drama) Chris Sheller, Brad Pitt, Tom Skerritt.	Aladdin "The Vapor Chase"	ChalkZone (E)	Lathe Show	College Basketball Florida State at Maryland. (Taped)	ER "X's Little Help From My Friends"	Access Hollywood							
16:00	Pokémon		Jeopardy!	Headline News	The Late Late Show										
16:30	Yo-Gi-Oh! (Part 3 & 4)		Headline News	ESPN News											
17:00	AAahh! Real Monsters	Access Hollywood	Headline News	ESPN News											
17:30	Rocky Power	Entertainment Tonight	Headline News	ESPN News											
18:00	SpongeBob SquarePants	Headline News	Headline News	ESPN News											
18:30	Rugrats So Goes America.		Headline News	ESPN News											
19:00	Lizzie McGuire	Mov 5 ** "Orange County" (2002, Comedy) Colin Hanks, Jack Black.	Headline News	ESPN News											
19:30	Noel, Noel		Headline News	ESPN News											
20:00	Smallville "Hesper"		Headline News	ESPN News											
20:30			Headline News	ESPN News											
21:00	Boys Meets World	(37) Movie ** "Mr. Deeds" (2002, Comedy) Adam Sandler, Winona Ryder. A pizza maker inherits a fortune from a distant relative.	Headline News	ESPN News											
21:30	Boys Meets World		Headline News	ESPN News											
22:00	The Cozy Show "Pittsburgh"		Headline News	ESPN News											
22:30	Home Improvement	Holiday Movie Magic	Headline News	ESPN News											
23:00	Touched by an Angel "Deconstructing Harry"	Mov 5 ** "Unlawful Entry" (1992, Kurt Russell)	Headline News	ESPN News											
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2004															
00:00	AAahh! Real Monsters	(11:30) Movie **** "Unlawful Entry" (1992) Ray Liotta	(11:30) Lathe Show	Headline News	Headline News	SportsCenter	Headline News With Conan O'Brien	Headline News							
00:30	Rocky Power "It's for Dad"		Access Hollywood	Headline News	NBC Nightly News		Musiq guest Ames Marn, MTV personality and ONDC talk-show host Dailey Fuentes.	Play in the Big Blue House							
1:00	SpongeBob SquarePants	(36) Movie **** "The Fighting Seaboard" (1999, Comedy) John Wayne, Susan Hayward, Dennis O'Keefe.	Headline News	Comme the Cow	ABC World News Tonight			Comme the Cow							
1:30	Rugrats		Monday Night Countdown	Headline News	NBC Evening News	PBA Bowling Oregon County Classic, from Fountain Valley, Calif. (Taped)		Headline News							
2:00	Lizzie McGuire		Dr. Phil	Headline News	The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer			Law & Order "Chosen"	Dr. Phil						
2:30	Noel, Noel			Headline News	Amby & Colmes	NBA Basketball Phoenix Suns at Denver Nuggets, From the Pigeon Center in Denver, (Live)		American Hot Rod "Alumabutt"	Oprah Winfrey						
3:00	Smallville "Hesper"	Mov 5 ** "Orange County" (2002, Comedy) Colin Hanks, Jack Black.	NFL Football New England Patriots at Miami Dolphins, From Pro Player Stadium in Miami, (Live)	Oprah Winfrey	NBC Nightly News										
3:30				Headline News	Judge Judy	Headline News									
4:00	Boys Meets World	(37) Movie ** "Mr. Deeds" (2002, Comedy) Adam Sandler, Winona Ryder. A pizza maker inherits a fortune from a distant relative.	Headline News	Headline News	Nightly Business Report	Do Loobz Tonight		Friends	NBC Nightly News						
4:30	Boys Meets World		Headline News	Headline News	Justice			Seinfeld "The Dealership"	Judge Judy						
5:00	Sesame Street (E)		Access Hollywood	Headline News	Low Dobbs Tonight	Breathingspace Yoga		Access Hollywood							
5:30	Barney & Friends (E)		(25) Guiding Light	Headline News	Lucy King Live	Caribbean Workout		Access Hollywood							
6:00	Barney & Friends (E)		(13) General Hospital	Headline News	Larry King Live	Body Shaping		Access Hollywood							
7:00	Dragon Tales (E)	Access Hollywood	Play With Me Sesame	Headline News	NewsNight With Aaron Brown	Typical Mary Ellen		The View	Isy						
7:30	Bob the Builder		Play With Me Sesame	Headline News	NewsNight With Aaron Brown			The View	Isy						
8:00	The Wiggles "Furry Greg"	Entertainment Tonight	Comme the Cow	Headline News	BET Nightly News			Alinnuans							
8:30	Don the Explorer "Surprise"		What of Fortune	Headline News	Ten Kids News (E)			All Grow Up							
9:00	The Wild Thornberrys	Mov 5 ** "Danger Island!" (1992, Richard Beatty, Kathy Ireland, Piane-chris) survivors explore exotic island.	Dr. Phil	Headline News	Jeopardy!	College Basketball Princeton at Temple. (Taped)		30-Minute Meals	Headline News						
9:30	The Wild Thornberrys		Headline News	Headline News	Amby Newswatch			Sweet Dreams	Headline News						
10:00	ChaZkZone (E)	(9-48) Oprah Winfrey	(9-48) Oprah Winfrey	ESPN News	Hardball With Chris Matthews			Strip for Less	ESPN News						
10:30	ChaZkZone (E)	(35) Guiding Light	(35) Guiding Light	Advisory Block				Beet	Pacific Report						
11:00	Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius	(16:00) Movie **** "Ocean's Eleven" (2001) George Clooney A suave con-assemble a team to rob a casino vault.	(17) General Hospital	Headline News	NFL Football New England Patriots at Miami Dolphins, From Pro Player Stadium in Miami.	The O'Reilly Factor	SportsCenter	Headline News							
11:30	Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius		Headline News	Headline News				The King of Queens							
12:00	Kim Possible (E)		Judge Judy	Headline News				The King of Queens							
12:30	Kim Possible		Today Dennis Quaid, holiday messages.	Headline News				Girlfriends							
13:00	Planet's Funniest Animals	Mov 5 ** "Pretty in Pink" (1986, Dennis Miller) A poor electric teen is romanced by a wealthy classmate.	Today Dennis Quaid, holiday messages.	Headline News				Charm'd "Centennial of Charm"							
13:30	Mov 5 ** "The Wild Thornberrys Movie" (2002) Vance of Lacey Chabert, Tom Kene.		The Tonight Show	Headline News				Aly McBeal "The Ex-Files"	ESPN News						
14:00	Funniest Home Videos	(2:51) Movie ** "The Fan" (1996, Robert De Niro, James Caan) A man's obsession with a woman's kidnapping baseball star is stilled by a psychic advisor.	I Spy	Headline News	Amby Newswatch			Any Day Now "Say of Excuse"	The Tonight Show						
15:00	Full House		Jeopardy!	Headline News	Hardball With Chris Matthews			ER "A Saint in the City"	Lathe Show						
16:00	Pokémon		Headline News	Headline News				Law & Order "True North"	Headline News						
16:30	Yo-Gi-Oh!	The Entertainers	Jeopardy!	Headline News	AT Grow Up			The Late Late Show	The Late Late Show						
17:00	AAahh! Real Monsters		Jeopardy!	Headline News	Teen Kids News (E)										
17:30	Rocky Power		Jeopardy!	Headline News											
18:00	SpongeBob SquarePants	Behind the Scenes	Jeopardy!	Headline News											
18:30	SpongeBob SquarePants	Entertainment Tonight	Jeopardy!	Headline News											
19:00	Oliver, the Other Reindeer	Mov 5 ** "Vertical Limit" (2000) Chris O'Donnell, Bill Paxton Mountain climbers are trapped in an icy cave on a remote peak.	Jeopardy!	Headline News											
20:00	Everwood "My Family Values"	(13:00) Movie **** "Ocean's Eleven" (2001) George Clooney A suave con-assemble a team to rob a casino vault.	Jeopardy!	Headline News											
20:30	Seaside, Sister! "Doo"	(13:00) Movie **** "Double Klutznick" (1999) Diana Ross, Brandy A rising young singer's mother steps back into her life.	Jeopardy!	Headline News											
21:00	Seaside, Sister! "The Nutcracker"		Headline News	Headline News											
21:30	The Cozy Show "Trust Me"		Headline News	Headline News											
22:00	Home Improvement		Headline News	Headline News											
22:30	Touched by an Angel "The Yinger"	Mov 5 ** "Bridg" (1984, Drama) Nicolas Cage.	Headline News	Headline News											
23:00			Lathe Show	Headline News											

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2004

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FACES

Obama signs book deal worth \$1.9M

U.S. Sen.-elect Barack Obama, whose 1995 book jumped onto best-seller lists after his keynote address to the Democratic National Convention, has landed a three-book deal worth \$1.9 million.

Crown Publishing Group and Random House Children's Books, divisions of Random House Inc., announced Friday that Obama will write two books for adults and one for children.

He'll be paid an \$850,000 advance for each adult book and \$200,000 for the children's book, said Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs. Proceeds from the children's book, which Obama will work on with his wife, Michelle, and their two young daughters, will go to charity, Gibbs said.

The contract is contingent on the approval of the Senate Ethics Committee, he said.

Obama, 43, will become the sole black U.S. senator — and only the fifth in history — when he is sworn in next month.

Sheen, Richards expecting another child

Christmas has come early for Charlie Sheen and Denise Richards.

The couple are expecting their second child, due in June, *People* magazine reports. Their first, daughter Sam Sheen, was born in March.

"They are incredibly thrilled and I couldn't think of a better Christmas present for the both of them and for little Sam," the magazine quotes Richards as saying. Richards, 33, and Sheen, 39, married in June 2002. The couple met while shooting the film "Good Advice" in 2000. They began dating after Richards did guest spots on Sheen's former TV series, "Spin City."



Richards and Sheen

Legal troubles continue for DMX

Rapper DMX was arrested for allegedly driving more than 100 mph on a highway in the suburbs of New York City, a week after he pleaded guilty to driving through an airport parking garage while on drugs.

The 33-year-old rapper, whose real name is Earl Simmons, was pulled over Wednesday evening on Interstate 684 after driving 104 mph in a 65 mph zone, police said.

Because his license had been suspended after the airport incident, Simmons was arrested on charges of third-degree aggravated unlicensed operation. State police said he was also charged with speeding and driving an unregistered vehicle.

Simmons was released on \$350 bail and ordered to appear in court Jan. 18 in North Castle, about 40 miles north of New York City.

His lawyer, Murray Richman, said he could not comment because he had not talked to the rapper.

Simmons was charged in June with smashing into a gate with his vehicle at Kennedy Airport after telling a parking lot attendant he was a federal agent. He later admitted to being on Valium at the time.

High-priced high rise for Murdoch

Rupert Murdoch, the billionaire CEO of News Corp., has offered to buy a three-story penthouse for \$44 million, which would be the highest price ever paid for a Manhattan apartment if the deal goes through.

Murdoch and his family must also be approved by the co-op board of the building, at 834 Fifth Avenue. The New York Times reported Friday, citing an unnamed source informed of the negotiations.

Howard Rubenstein, a spokesman for Murdoch, declined to comment to the Times.

The New York Post, which is owned by News Corp., reported last week that the apartment, the former home of Laurence S. Rockefeller, had been sold — but did not name the buyer.

The 20-room apartment spans the 14th, 15th and 16th floors of the building. It has 8,000 square feet of floor space and spacious terraces on each floor. The monthly maintenance fee is \$21,469.07.

Stories and photos from The Associated Press



An unusual suspect

Kevin Spacey directs, acts, sings and swings in new Bobby Darin biopic

Kevin Spacey performs during the "Beyond the Sea" tour at Wilshire Theatre in Los Angeles on Dec. 6.

AP

BY DAVID GERMAIN
The Associated Press

TORONTO

Bobby Darin wanted it all and pretty much got it: Pop music stardom, success as a folk singer, a reputation as one of the great stage showmen, acclaim as a movie actor.

When it came to his Darin film biography "Beyond the Sea," Kevin Spacey also wanted it all and pretty much got it. Spacey starred, directed, co-wrote, sang and danced.

He's even going on tour with a 19-piece big band to promote the film, crooning tunes from Darin's eclectic repertoire, which includes "Splish-Splash," "Mack the Knife," "Dream Lover," "If I Were a Carpenter" and the movie's title track.

Multitasking to that extent is a risk for any actor. For Spacey, the gamble is even greater, coming at a career downturn in which his big-screen bankability has waned.

Since winning his second Academy Award for 1999's "American Beauty," Spacey, 45, has starred in four straight studio flicks that proved to be critical and commercial duds — "Pay It Forward," "K-PAX," "The Shipping News" and "The Life of David Gale."

"The studio films I've done, I was an actor for hire, so the responsibility of being the storyteller wasn't mine," Spacey said in an interview at September's Toronto International Film Festival, where "Beyond the Sea" premiered. "And in this case it is, so if this film works, it's because of the vast talents of a great number of people, and if it doesn't, there's nobody to blame but me. And I accept that going in. My eyes are wide open."

Early reaction to the film has been lukewarm, though Spacey earned praise for his warm, energetic performance and spirited vocals.

Spacey had performed in musicals from his early teens into his 20s, but good singing roles had since eluded him. He said he chose to sing himself because he's generally not a fan of lip-synched performances, and relying on his own voice allowed him to expand on the music without being tied to Darin's original vocal tracks.

"This wasn't about an actor's ego, wanting to get my rocks off by singing in a movie. This was about trying to do something that would honor him as an entertainer," Spacey said. "This is all about Bobby. It's about trying to reintroduce people to his catalog and hoping that this film will ignite a kind of recognition of his body of work that's just been denied too long."

"Beyond the Sea" traces Darin's cloistered childhood, when he was afflicted with rheumatic fever, through his varied recording and acting career, which culminated in an Academy Award nomination for his role in 1963's "Captain Newman, M.D."

A Darin devotee since his teens, Spacey dreamed of mak-

ing "Beyond the Sea" for 12 years. Studios were unwilling to finance a film about a comparatively forgotten singer who died in 1973 at 37 after open-heart surgery.

"Every door slammed in my face," said Spacey, who eventually found overseas financing. "Politely, but every door slammed in my face."

Darin's family also had objections, first, to the film itself, second, to the thought that anyone's voice but Darin's would be used for the soundtrack. Spacey gradually won over Darin's reluctant loved ones, including manager and pal Steve Blauner, played by John Goodman, and son Dodd from his marriage to teen idol Sandra Dee, played by Kate Bosworth.

The film also co-stars Brenda Blethyn as Darin's mother, Caroline Aaron as his sister and Bob Hoskins as his brother-in-law.

Hoskins recalls his initial skepticism when he met with Spacey over dinner to discuss the film.

"He said, 'I'm going to direct it, I'm going to act in it, and I'm going to sing the songs, and I'm doing the dancing.' 'Yeah, you are, are you?'" Hoskins said. "And he said, 'Really, I am.' Well, I thought, if anybody's going to stick their neck out that far, I'm going with them."

Spacey has stuck his neck out before. After a successful early career on stage, Spacey broke into movies but found himself typecast as sleazebag or outright monsters, including the serial killer of "Seven" and a motor-mouthed low-life in "The Usual Suspects."

Kevin Spacey

Consciously trying to reinvent himself, Spacey bulled his way to more varied roles with "L.A. Confidential," "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil," "The Negotiator," "L.A. Confidential" and "American Beauty," for which he won the best-actor Oscar as an acerbically funny husband in a midlife crisis.

For the foreseeable future, though, Spacey plans to stick largely to the stage.

"I'm going to be a theater rat for a while," Spacey said. "I'll probably do less movies than plays for the next five, six, seven, eight years."

Spacey took over this year as artistic director of London's Old Vic theatre and plans to star in two plays there in 2005: Dennis McIntyre's "National Anthems" and "The Philadelphia Story," the basis for the classic film comedy starring Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant and James Stewart. Spacey will play Grant's role as a conniving ex-husband.

Spacey shrugs off his artistic misfires, including his recent string of film flops, saying he wants to keep his career focus on the long haul.

"There were a lot of years when people were really crapping on Paul Simon. Whatever happened to Paul Simon? He used to be good," Spacey said. "Then 'Graceland' came out, and everybody was in love with Paul Simon again."



Murdoch

Horoscope

Mercury dusts off his hands and says, "Enough!" This process of rehearsing and reviewing is getting old already! Yes, looking back has a purpose, but it's about time we figured out what to do with now. It will take three weeks for Mercury to come completely out of the shadow, and this creates the illusion of time stretching.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY

(December 20). Celebrate your power this year — others take note and give you even more reasons to rejoice. Next month is key in raising your financial status. Ask for money due you or a deserved raise. Your sex appeal is unmistakable this year, and singles have hot dates through the spring. You could wind up with a Scorpio or Cancer.

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Put in the work required, and you'll shine. Talent and willpower are inextricably woven together. There are no outstanding talents who are not also notoriously disciplined when it comes to honing their craft.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

You'll be blessed — and then blessed again and again ... too much of a good thing can be bad for you, making you feel overwhelmed. Be judicious, and know when to pass your bounty on to the next person.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

Because of your contagious zest for life, you're the one who can help that person with the defeatist "been there, done that" attitude. It's lucky to extend an invite and then take only "yes" for an answer.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

Growth is the word of the day. Think of everything as alive — thoughts are alive, energy is alive, and love is alive. What's alive requires breath and food. Feed and oxygenate your relationship with the world.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22)

Karma zings back in fast motion — you'd have to try hard not to get the mes-

sage. So now you know what you are giving by looking hard and long at what has come back at you. Make adjustments accordingly.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

You're holding out for the one (job, person, dress sale), and it's the word "wait" is so passive, implying you're twiddling your thumbs until the perfect situation arrives, which, of course, you're not.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)

Unconsciously, you're looking for ways to reward yourself for work that feels, at the present time, largely unrewarded. While you're at it, you may as well go for big rewards instead of piddly ones like snack food.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21)

The brimming excitement of the season is getting to you — you're all swept up and ready to give, give, give. Or should I say, spend, spend, spend? You can do the first without overdoing the latter.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

Someone seems to have cast a spell on you, as you're moving through the day in an enchanted haze. Then again, this seeing reality through a magical fog is kind of nice. Enjoy it while it lasts.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

Some people resent being stuck between a rock and a hard place, but you wisely realize that this usually means there's nowhere to go but up! Ask for a lifeline, and helicopter your way out of a tough situation.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

Nothing breaks up monotony like the warm feelings you get around good, solid people. Sensational news on the social front is featured — when friends have something to celebrate, you have to, too.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

Life is like a jazz trio. When you're given the opportunity to solo, play your heart out! A shameless self-promoter has something to teach you. Take this lesson all the way to the bank.

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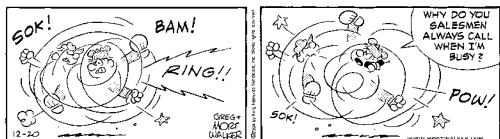
Cathy



Hi and Lois



Beetle Bailey



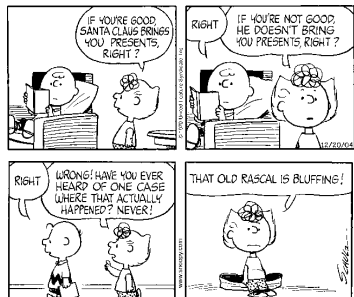
Red Rover



Better or Worse



Peanuts



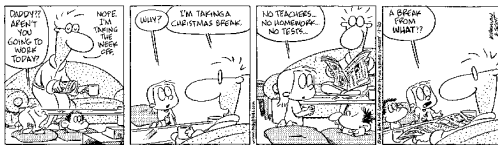
Fotrot



B.C.



Baby Blues



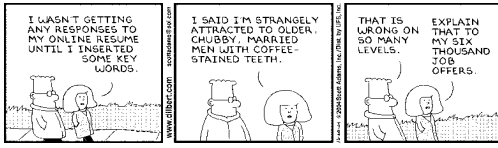
Spider Man



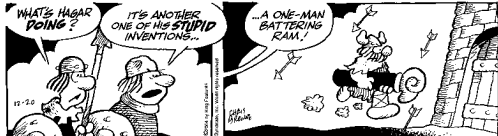
Blondie



Dilbert



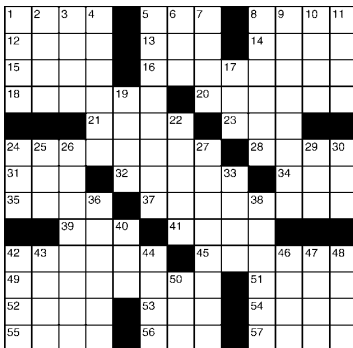
Hagar



Garfield



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



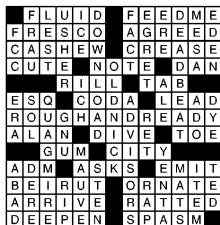
Across

- 1 Counterfeit
- 5 Bankroll
- 8 Spill the beans
- 12 South American city
- 14 Anger
- 15 Somewhere out there
- 16 Home
- 18 Handful, in a sense
- 20 Defiant, in a sense
- 21 Play area
- 23 People in general
- 24 Home
- 28 Pleasant
- 31 Computer button
- 32 Non-native Hawaiian
- 34 Year-end beverage
- 35 Campus bigwig
- 37 Home
- 39 Blythe cream quantity
- 41 Jodie Foster movie
- 42 Vinegary
- 45 Proverbs preceders
- 49 Home
- 51 Carriage
- 52 Hedgepodge
- 53 Pitch
- 54 Largest of the seven
- 55 Ollie's pal
- 56 Dash lengths
- 57 Crooned

Down

- 1 Rebuff a masher
- 2 Stereo arrangement
- 3 Latin 101 word
- 4 Constant sufferer
- 5 Literate and informed
- 6 Past
- 7 Extinct bird
- 8 Londoner or Liverpoolian
- 9 Pasta variety (Var.)
- 10 Kelp, e.g.
- 11 Harry's first lady
- 17 Fellow
- 19 Solemn pledge
- 22 Overwhelm
- 24 Proof abbr.
- 25 Exploit
- 26 Collegiate community
- 27 Unexpected hits
- 29 Anti
- 30 34-Across ingredient
- 33 Right angles
- 36 Country
- 38 Peruvian pack
- 40 Pen name
- 42 Commotions
- 43 Future stallion
- 44 Give as an example
- 46 Sax-playing Simpson
- 47 Chow
- 48 Unforeseen hangup
- 50 Felon's flight

Answer to Previous Puzzle



12-20

CRYPTOQUIP

A Q E Q S M N R U A T Z ' T
V E P X C E Z X C S , S X G M X G V F
O C X P E P V S T E S Z N R C R A T

M X U O X G Q F A Q Z R C R T Z .
Saturday's Cryptoquip: IF THERE'S
SOMETHING YOU DON'T WANT MOTHER TO
FIND OUT, DO YOU SAY "MOM'S THE WORD"?
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Q equals N

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Heidelberg takes both titles in K-town hoop tournament

BY RUSTY BRYAN

Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Heidelberg's men and women swept the titles in the 24th annual Kaiserslautern Christmas Tournament on Sunday.

Heidelberg's Generals defeated Ramstein 70-68 in the final of the men's event; the Lady Generals turned back Kaiserslautern 66-61 to complete an unbeaten run through the tournament.

Heidelberg men 70, Ramstein 68: Former Schweinfurt star Terrance Flemon disrupted Ramstein's inbounds play with nine seconds remaining to preserve the victory.

After Heidelberg's Troy Adams missed the front end of a one-and-one with 12 seconds left, Ramstein's Germichael Kelley attempted to push the rebound down the floor. But Flemon cut him off in Heidelberg's end and forced Kelley to call a timeout.

"I told the team I didn't want Ramstein to be inbounding the ball towards the basket," said Heidelberg coach Bobby Seabery, whose team lost to Ramstein

73-72 in Sunday's first game. "I wanted them to bring the ball backward, to have to go as many feet as possible."

To ensure that, Seabery instructed Flemon, who finished with 13 points eight rebounds, to jump up and down in front of Ramstein veteran Kenny Bean. Bean was forced to pass the ball in to Robert Batte in the Heidelberg forecourt, and the Generals cut him off as he dribbled toward the Ramstein end. With time running out, Batte passed wide to Pete Lenoir, whose off-balance desperation shot from nearly midcourt fell wide and short.

Adams led Heidelberg with 18 points, half of them on three-pointers. Adams scored a field goal and free throw in the final 2:30 for the decisive margin; Andre Barnes, who earlier had coached the Lady Generals to their title, added the 70th point on one of two free throws.

Craig Marcelin, the Armed Forces team mainstay who had scored 19 points in Heidelberg's 78-70 victory over Ramstein in Saturday's winners-bracket final, added 10 points for Heidelberg. Kenyatta Mack had 14

points, nine rebounds and a blocked shot for the Generals.

Austin Layton led the Rams with 18 points. Ramstein got 13 from Larry Sengul, 12 from Batiste and 11 from Troy Miles. But the Rams managed to sink only two field goals in the last 6:11 of the game.

"I told the team that if this game was close, there was no way Ramstein was going to get the ball at the end," Seabery said.

Heidelberg lost to Ramstein in last season's U.S. Forces Europe title game.

Heidelberg women 66, Kaiserslautern 61: The Lady Generals were playing without leading scorer and rebounder Tiffany Collins, who averaged 19 points in Heidelberg's previous two victories here but was playing with her German league team on Sunday, but the Lady Generals got 17 points each from Nina Beamon and Tina Barnes to take up the slack.

"Everyone pulled together and played together," Barnes said of his team, which also was missing veteran scoring threat Rhonda Williams because of injury. "We believed in one another, and that's a big deal."



U.S. Army Spc. Jason Baldwin, center, of Rochelle, Ill., who was wounded in action, stands with other military personnel honoring the flag prior to the start of the game between the Dallas Mavericks and the Atlanta Hawks on Saturday night in Dallas. Nearly 1400 season-ticket holders donated their front row tickets so the soldiers could enjoy the game. The Mavericks defeated the Hawks 90-68.

Mavs' stiff defense too much for Hawks

BY JAIME ARON

The Associated Press

DALLAS — The Dallas Mavericks got instant results from a two-day crash course in defense. Then again, it helped that they were playing the Atlanta Hawks.

The Hawks matched a franchise-low by scoring 28 points in the first half and the Mavericks wound up tying a franchise low for points allowed in a game in a 90-68 victory Saturday night.

"It was what I expected after a couple days of practice," Dallas coach Don Nelson said.

Dirk Nowitzki led Dallas with 15 points and 12 rebounds, despite losing his front teeth. His gritty performance was fitting considering 137 U.S. soldiers wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan sat in front-row seats.

The soldiers from Brooke Army Medical Center near San Antonio were flown in as part of a thank-you campaign thought up by a season-ticket holder, with more than \$150,000 in court-side seats donated by fellow season-ticket holders. The soldiers — all wearing matching T-shirts and many with their injuries quite apparent — received a standing ovation after the first quarter.

Nowitzki was hit in the mouth by teammate Jason Terry and Atlanta's Jason Collier while going for a rebound a few minutes in.

He returned late in the first quarter without the dental bridge that comprises most of his top teeth. He had it put back in at halftime with a cream a team employee bought at a drug store during the first half.

"I was lucky enough that my dentist was actually at the game," Nowitzki said. "He came in and fixed it real quick. I've got to go back and see him [Sunday]."

Nowitzki played 32 minutes, making five of 12 shots and uncharacteristically missing five of 10 foul shots. It hardly mattered, though, because of how poorly the Hawks played.

Atlanta opened with seven straight misses and made just one of its first 15 shots. The Hawks



Forward Dirk Nowitzki led the Mavericks with 15 points and 12 rebounds despite having a dental bridge knocked out in the first quarter of Saturday's victory.

didn't get a basket from a starter until there was 1:23 left in the first quarter and they finished the period with just 12 points. They had 16 in the second quarter, getting the last two on foul shots with 0.5 seconds left, giving them just 28 at halftime for the fourth time in franchise history.

Their 68 points set a season low for the second time in three games; they had 69 against Houston on Wednesday. Atlanta shot just 33 percent in losing its fifth straight, keeping the Hawks stuck at four wins, second worst in the NBA.

"The first and second quarters were a disaster offensively," coach Mike Woodson said. "We just couldn't make our shots. We lost our confidence a little bit shooting the ball."

Considering that the Hawks missed layups, dunks and 10 of their first 14 free throws during the slow start, it's hard to credit the Mavs' defense too much. But Dallas, which had lost its last three at home, was coming off two long practices in which coach Don Nelson tried regaining the defensive intensity his players showed when they started the season 7-1.

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Shell interested in Dolphins' vacancy

The Associated Press

MIAMI — Former Oakland Raiders coach Art Shell is interested in the Miami Dolphins' job, possibly joining LSU coach Nick Saban as a candidate, an NFL source with knowledge of the job search said Saturday.

Shell might receive an interview, the source said on condition of anonymity. By interviewing Shell, the NFL's senior vice president for football operations in Miami is complying with a league requirement that teams interview a minority candidate for any coaching vacancy.

Shell became the first black coach of the modern era in 1989 with the Raiders, but he hasn't been a head coach since 1994.

Dolphins interim coach Jim Bates is also expected to interview for the job. Preparing his team to play the New England Patriots, Bates said he advised management he wants to wait until after the game to discuss plans for an interview.

"I told them I didn't want anything to distract me from Monday night's game," Bates said.

Saban, the only coach the Dolphins have confirmed is a candidate, said he has had no contact with Miami since interviewing Tuesday with owner Wayne Huizenga and resident Eddie Jones in Baton Rouge, La.

"I don't have a timetable," Saban said. "I don't know what your timetable is... They need time to go through the process and the things they need to do, and we'll make a decision as soon as we get the parameters of what the job basically entails."

If offered the Dolphins job, Saban said, his decision won't be easy.

"It's especially difficult when you enjoy a good job that you enjoy so much, and have a tremendous amount of gratitude for the opportunity to continue to have

success here because of the tremendous support," he said.

In five seasons at Louisiana State, Saban has won two Southeastern Conference titles and the 2003 BCS national championship. He's preparing LSU for a game against Iowa in the Capital One Bowl on Jan. 1 in Orlando, and his possible departure has alarmed Tigers fans.

The Dolphins declined to comment Saturday on their search. Saban has been considered the favorite for the job ever since coach Dave Wannstedt resigned last month after Miami started the season 1-8.

Shell, a Hall of Fame offensive tackle, played for the Oakland-Los Angeles Raiders from 1968-82 and had a 56-41 record coaching the Raiders from 1989-94. He led them to three playoff berths and to the AFC title game in 1991.

He also worked as an assistant coach for the Raiders, Kansas City and Atlanta.

Grandi wins first Cup GS

ALTA BADIA, Italy — Canada's Thomas Grandi won a giant slalom Sunday for his first World Cup victory in his 12 seasons at the circuit.

Austria's Benjamin Raich was second and Switzerland's Didier Cuche and Austria's Hermann Maier shared third.

Bode Miller missed a gate and did not finish his second run, reducing the American's lead in the overall standings. Winner of 13 of 13 races this season, Miller still holds a 798-479 points lead on Maier.

Miller said he skied over a rock during his first run and was in 20th place, perhaps causing him to be too aggressive in the second run.

Grandi became the first Canadian man to win a World Cup race since Cary Mullen at Aspen, Colo., in 1994. Grandi was second after the first run. He covered the steep and twisting Gran Risa course in a two-run time of 2 minutes, 34.23 seconds.

Judges go Johnson's way in bout with Tarver

By JOHN NADEL

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Glen Johnson knows what it's like to put his fate in the hands of boxing judges and have decisions go against him.

So, he was prepared for the worst Saturday night. He got the best.

Johnson, a virtual unknown until knocking out Roy Jones Jr., three months ago, won a split decision over Antonio Tarver in a matchup of the world's best light-heavyweights.

"My heart was beating real fast," he said with a smile when asked if he was concerned about the outcome. "I came out ahead, which doesn't happen too often. I'm just thankful."

The Staples Center crowd cheered throughout the final round, and when it ended, both fighters thrust their fists into the air, proclaiming victory.

The winner proved to be Johnson, who overcame Tarver's 4-inch height advantage to win, mainly by being the aggressor through most of the 12-round bout.

The 35-year-old Johnson raised his record to 42-2-2 with 28 knockouts. He didn't begin to box until he was 20, and turned professional three years later.

Johnson won his first 32 professional fights but was 9-2 in his most recent 20 before Saturday night. He thought he was one of those that he lost, but the judges involved ruled otherwise.

"I fought my best fight, the outcome is what it is," he said.

Judges Melvin Lathan and Chuck Giampa scored the bout 115-113 in favor of Johnson. Judge Marty Denkin had it 115-112 for Tarver.

The Associated Press scored it 115-113 for Tarver. The 6-foot-2½ Tarver, a local favorite, said he was disappointed he won by dictating the pace and throwing the harder punches.

"I could have gone either way. I closed strong," Tarver said.

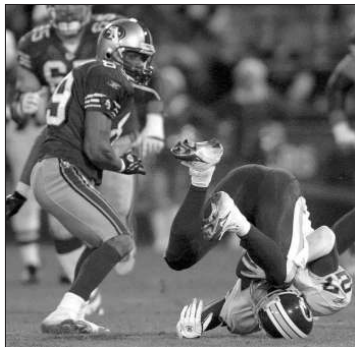
Lathan and Giampa didn't think so, with each giving Johnson the final three rounds.

Tarver, a southpaw, said he injured his left hand when he hit Johnson in the fourth or fifth round.

"My best weapon was taken away from me," he said.

"That's boxing. It's a tough sport. We both fought like warriors. We prepared for the best Glen Johnson. He's proven to be a worthy champion. Tonight's his night."

"We'll be back. That's the mark of a champion — if you can come back from defeat. We all know I can. Congratulations to Glen."



CONTRA COSTA TIMES/KURT

Washington Redskins Wall Harris comes up with a fourth quarter interception as intended 49ers receiver Curtis Conway watches.

Skins capitalize on 49ers' errors

By GREG BEACHAM

The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Antonio Pierce found out just how easy it has become to beat the San Francisco 49ers: Simply stand in one place and allow their mistakes to find you.

The Washington linebacker got his first NFL touchdown on an interception thrown by Ken Dorsey, who hit Pierce between the numbers deep in Redskins territory with 48 seconds left in the first half.

Pierce returned it 78 yards for a score in a 26-16 victory on Saturday. Though the Redskins committed many of the same penalties, mistakes and lapses that have plagued their season, he realized Washington's problems pale in comparison to San Francisco's woes.

"San Francisco, they're going to improve in the future, but we felt this was a game we should have, no excuses," said Pierce, who had the biggest of Washington's four interceptions. "It was 78 yards to the end zone? I knew there was a reason I was tired."

Patrick Ramsey passed for 214 yards and a touchdown, Clinton Portis rushed for 110 yards and Rod Gardner caught six passes for 111 yards — but the Redskins (5-9) were disappointed in their offense, which scored its only touchdown on the opening drive.

"We had an opportunity to lose that game if our defense didn't play so well," Ramsey said. "The offense is contributing more, but not as much as we would like. We've just got to get the ball in the end zone."

Washington also committed 11 penalties for 93 yards to stay on pace to break the franchise record. Without newcomer Jeff Chandler, who kicked four field

goals, the Redskins' task would have been much tougher.

But when teams face San Francisco (2-12), they've got plenty of margin for all sorts of errors.

"The thing that I am proudest of is just the way they fight," coach Joe Gibbs said. "I think our guys fight hard every week, and sometimes things are not that pretty. We just fought and played hard."

The Redskins took a 19-point lead late in the first half, and the sturdy defense shut out the Niners' offense for more than 45 minutes between Brandon Lloyd's early TD catch and Curtis Conway's scoring grab with 4:26 left.

Dorsey, making his fifth start in place of injured Tim Rattay, doubled his interception total for the season, including three in the first half. He finished 20-for-38 for 206 yards, but the 49ers remained on track for the top draft pick with more of the bland offense and step-slow defense that has defined their season.

"Defensively, time after time after time, we kept ourselves in the football game," 49ers coach Dennis Erickson said. "We just didn't make the plays we needed to, throwing the football."

With season-ending losses to Buffalo and New England, San Francisco could match the worst records in franchise history, set in 1978 and 1979.

"Two very costly decisions, that's how I sum up this game," Dorsey said, referring to two of his first-half interceptions. "At the end of the half, you've got to get at least three points out of that. That's all things you've got to learn from and make sure don't happen again."

Star linebacker LaVar Arington returned to the Redskins' lineup after missing 11 weeks with a knee injury.

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Players added to proposed Johnson deal

From wire reports

NEW YORK — The megadeal involving Randy Johnson, Shawn Green and Javier Vazquez grew to 10 players Saturday, with the New York Yankees, Arizona and Los Angeles hoping to present the proposed trade to the commissioner's office soon for approval.

Pitchers Kaz Ishii, Mike Kopeck and Brandon Weeden are now part of the deal, a baseball official told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The teams were aiming to put the whole deal down on paper this weekend and give it to the commissioner's office perhaps by Monday.

The deal needs permission because it involves more than \$1 million — as it stands, the Yankees would pay \$2 million of Ishii's contract.

Plus, there might be a spinoff to the deal. There's speculation the Dodgers might get Vazquez from the Yankees and then trade the pitcher to the Chicago White Sox.

Johnson remains the centerpiece of the trade, with the Yankees trying to get the five-time Cy Young winner from Arizona. New York also would acquire Ishii, a left-hander who went 13-8 with a 4.71 ERA for Los Angeles last season.

Johnson has a no-trade clause, but wants to play for the Yankees. Green also has a no-trade provision, and the Dodgers outfielder has not yet waived it to play for Arizona.

The Diamondbacks might be able to get Green to come to the desert, though — his former agent, Jeff Moorad, is Arizona's new chief executive officer.



Though talks stalled several weeks ago, GM Omar Minaya's visit to the Dominican Republic indicates the New York Mets may be renewing their efforts to acquire Sammy Sosa, above.

Mets GM Minaya travels to Dominican to visit Sosa

Sammy Sosa renewed his vows with wife, Sonia, on Saturday in the Dominican Republic. Mets General Manager Omar Minaya attended the religious service, and appears to be renewing his efforts to obtain the slugger.

Privately, Mets insiders say their differences with the Cubs on finances were like "night and day" when talks stalled several weeks ago, and that with no other serious suitors and Sosa's recently diminished production, Chicago brass will need to cave in financially before any deal can be consummated. One team official said the team had "cooled" on Sosa.

Yet Minaya spoke at length at Thursday's news conference in Flushing to introduce Pedro Martinez about his ambition to make the Mets omnipresent in the Dominican Republic, the organization every prospect there dreams about. Adding Sosa certainly fits that goal.

Minaya also revealed that several players under contract to other teams have contacted him since Martinez committed to the Mets.

Athletics trade LHP Mulder for Cards for three prospects

By JANIE MCCAULEY

The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — The Oakland Athletics traded their second top starter in three days, sending left-hander Mark Mulder to the National League champion St. Louis Cardinals on Saturday for a package of prospects.

Mulder follows Tim Lincecum out of town, leaving Barry Zito as the only remaining member of Oakland's vaunted "Big Three" pitchers.

Hudson was dealt to Atlanta on Thursday for three mostly unproven players.

Mulder could be the top-notch pitcher the Cardinals sorely lacked when they got swept by the Boston Red Sox in the World Series, but that's if he's healthy.

In return, the A's acquired pitchers Danny Haren and Kiko Calero and minor league catcher Darik Barton.

"We're extremely excited to have obtained a pitcher of Mark's caliber," Cardinals General Manager Walt Jocketty said. "He is the top of the rotation-type pitcher we've been working hard to obtain this offseason. It was difficult to part with the three players we traded but to acquire someone like Mulder we felt that this deal worked for us in several ways."

Mulder replaces Woody Williams, who was not offered salary arbitration by the Cardinals and signed a free-agent deal earlier this month with San Diego. Mulder will join Chris Carpenter, Jason Marquis, Jeff Suppan and Matt Morris in a rotation where at least five pitchers will have 15 games last season. Morris might not be available until May after going under offseason shoulder surgery.



Mark Mulder was the second top starter to be traded by the Oakland Athletics in three days.

Mulder might have some health questions of his own, especially after his perplexing finish to last season.

The 6-foot-6 lefty, the AL starter in the All-Star Game, seemed destined for Cy Young award consideration midway through the season, but went winless in his last seven starts — 0-4 with a 7.27 ERA.

On Aug. 24, he became the first 17-game winner in the majors, then didn't win again. There was speculation he was hurt and not telling anyone.

Mulder missed the end of the 2003 season with a stress fracture in his right leg near the hip, then pitched a team-high 225½ innings in 2004.

He repeatedly claimed to be healthy despite a drop in his velocity late in the year. Manager Ken Macha said the day after the sea-

son Mulder probably did become worn down by his heavy work load.

Mulder (17-8) pitched so poorly during the playoff push, the A's briefly considered skipping his turn and using September call-up Joe Blanton during the final weekend against Anaheim. Mulder did get the call, but was knocked out after two innings, his shortest outing of the season — and the A's wound up missing the playoffs for the first time in five years.

He was drafted second overall by the A's in 1998 and was signed through the 2005 season with a club option to return in 2006.

After Hudson was swapped to the Braves, the news of Mulder's departure was even more shocking. At least in Hudson's case, there had been rumors swirling.

"What you've got to be kidding me," outfielder Eric Byrnes said of Mulder being traded. "Wow. I don't know what to tell you."

Haren, a 24-year-old right-hander, was 3-3 with a 4.50 ERA in 14 games, including five starts, in three stints with the Cardinals last season.

Calero went 3-1 with two saves and a 2.78 ERA in 11 relief appearances for St. Louis in 2004, allowing a 1.76 opponent batting average.

Barton was the Cardinals' first-round pick (28th overall) in 2003. He spent last season at Single-A Peoria, where he batted .313 with 13 home runs and 77 RBIs.

Mulder was the first major league trade between the clubs since in '03 A's dealt Mark McGwire to St. Louis on July 31, 1997, for T.J. Lincecum, a utility infielder, pitchers Blake Stein and Eric Ludwick.

AP Sports Writer R.B. Falstrom contributed to this story.



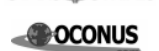
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D-mayor Williams staking career on saving Washington baseball deal

By BRETT ZONGKER

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Mayor Anthony A. Williams is staking his political career on whether his plan to bring Major League Baseball to the nation's capital is approved in the next two weeks.

Mayors are elected to lead and not be "a mirror and just reflect what people are saying," Williams said on "Fox News Sunday with Chris Wallace."

"Ten, 20 percent of the time you're elected to do what you think is in the best interests of the city," Williams said. "If people don't agree with that when they vote you out next time. And I think that is one of those issues."

The city's deal to transform the Montreal Expos into the Washington Nationals and build a \$440 million stadium along the Annapolis River waterfront has a Dec. 31 deadline with baseball owners. The District of Columbia Council



Williams

Williams is planning to meet with Council Chairman Linda W. Crapp on Monday to try to sort out a compromise that could include private financing as well as guarantees for baseball. City officials are trying to arrange a meeting with baseball as well, he said.

"I actually am somewhat hopeful and optimistic that we can work something out," Williams said.

Williams defended his stadium

funding plan, saying it is "public only insofar as the city is involved in it, but it's really private, in that the largest businesses of the city have stood up voluntarily" to pay a special tax to help build the stadium.

Critics have said the deal for publicly financed bonds is one of the most generous they have ever seen for a stadium.

Crapp said she is willing to call a special council session during the holidays to come up with an agreement, but baseball was not yet on the agenda Sunday for the final scheduled meeting of the year on Dec. 21, said Mark Johnson, a spokesman for Crapp. About 100 members of the D.C. Council were invited to participate in a town hall meeting on the issue Monday night, organized by a pro-baseball group. About 100 city residents were expected to attend, representing both sides of the issue, the group said.

Gonzaga regains its swagger with upset of Ga. Tech

The Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The Gonzaga Bulldogs showed they belonged on the floor with a top-5 team. That wasn't the case earlier in this young season.

Adam Morrison scored 24 points to lift No. 22 Gonzaga to an 85-73 victory Saturday night over No. 3 Georgia Tech in the Las Vegas Showdown.

In the opener of the double-header, No. 4 Oklahoma State beat UNLV 79-67.

Derek Raivio tied a career high with 21 points on 11-of-18 shooting for Gonzaga (8-1), which earned its biggest victory since beating No. 3 Missouri on Dec. 13, 2003.

During Thanksgiving weekend, Gonzaga faced No. 1 Illinois and was beaten by 17 points in the Wooden Tradition in Indianapolis.

The Bulldogs have turned things around in a hurry.

"We looked like a JV team against Illinois," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said. "So our approach for this game was different. I'm proud of how we came out and played tough. You have to play tough against the great teams and that is what we did."

Will Bynum scored a career-high 28 points, going 9-for-16 from the field and 7-for-8 from the free throw line. But it wasn't enough for the Yellow Jackets (7-1), who lost for the first time since falling to Connecticut in last season's NCAA tournament championship game.

Gonzaga led 45-41 at halftime and then held Georgia Tech scoreless for the first 4:46 of the second half. The Bulldogs twice built leads of 15 points, the second time at 68-53 with 10:28 left.

The Yellow Jackets closed to 75-70 with 3:28 left, but Gonzaga pulled away late.

"We didn't attack their zone well," Georgia Tech coach Paul Hewitt said. "Defensively, we didn't play as well as we are capable of. They had too many chances to drive down the middle of the floor."

Ronny Turiaf had 17 points and 10 rebounds for Gonzaga, and Sean Mallon added 11 points.

B.J. Elder scored 16 points and Jarrett Jack added 15 for Georgia Tech. The Yellow Jackets' reserves outscored Gonzaga's bench players 30-4.

Gonzaga Tech wasn't helped by the late start time. The tip was after midnight EST; the time zone the Yellow Jackets are used to and traveled from.

"In all fairness to them, this was a hard game," Few said. "It was a 12:30 a.m. start and they had to come across the country."

Gonzaga led 14-8 before Georgia Tech went on a 22-9 run to build its largest lead of the game, 30-23 with 8:41 left in the first half. Gonzaga refused to fold, re-



Oklahoma State's John Lucas drives for the basket against UNLV guard Jerel Blassingame.

sponding with a 9-0 run of its own on the way to taking charge of the game.

No. 4 Oklahoma St. 79, UNLV 67: By halftime, Oklahoma State had shaken off the rust from a week-long break for exams. The Cowboys went on a 15-point run to erase an early four-point deficit.

Joey Graham had 20 points and John Lucas added 17 for the Cowboys (8-0) as the Final Four team from a year ago remained undefeated.

"We are better than last year's team," said Graham, who led Oklahoma State with seven rebounds. "We have added so many assets."

UNLV, down by as many as 16 points, halved the deficit to 71-63 with 1:47 to play thanks to five straight points from Romel Beck.

Seconds later, however, Ivan McFarlin's dunk capped a perfectly executed fast break in helping the Cowboys close the game on an 8-4 run.

"We quit sharing the ball. That is not what this team is about," Graham said about letting UNLV back in the game.

McFarlin also had 17 points for the Cowboys, who forced 21 turnovers and held UNLV to 40 percent shooting in their first action since beating Alabama-Birmingham 86-73 eight days earlier.

Beck had 25 points for UNLV (3-4) and Jerel Blassingame added 19 and nine assists.

Graham and McFarlin had seven rebounds apiece as the Cowboys held a 38-33 advantage on the boards.

"We didn't back away in the second half," UNLV coach Lon Kruger said. "We found out that we have to be more physical."

"Oklahoma State is very strong and quick, and we didn't overcome that."



Erroll Knight, left, and Adam Morrison celebrate Gonzaga's 85-73 win over Georgia Tech on Saturday night.

A Special Holiday Wish for the Troops...

Merry Christmas!

STARS AND STRIPES
Your Hometown Newspaper

No. 2 Kansas holds off Gamecocks

The Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Russell Robinson scored four points in the final 36 seconds, allowing No. 2 Kansas to escape with a 64-60 victory over South Carolina Saturday night in a game in which the Gamecocks led most of the way.

South Carolina (5-2), a 17-point underdog in its first road game, came out with a full-court pressure defense and seized an 11-0 lead over the fumble-fingered Jayhawks.

Kansas (7-0) committed five turnovers and had a shot blocked in its first six possessions and didn't get its first lead until Keith Langford fed Christian Moody into to make a 54-52 with 5:03 to go.

Wayne Simien had 20 points and 11 rebounds for Kansas, despite leaving the game for about 5 minutes in the second half after injuring his right thumb. He returned with the thumb heavily taped.

No. 6 Wake Forest 89, No. 14 Texas 88: At Winston-Salem, N.C., Chris Paul had 23 points and 12 assists and Eric Williams added 19 points, helping Wake Forest (9-1) hold off Texas (7-2).

Kenton Paulino missed an 18-foot jumper just before the buzzer that would have won it for the Longhorns.

No. 7 Duke 78, Oklahoma 67: At New York, J.J. Redick had 19 of his 26 points in the second half and Daniel Ewing had 12 of his 17 after halftime, leading Duke's comeback.

The Blue Devils, who trailed 39-29 at halftime, are 8-0 for the fourth time in five seasons.

No. 8 Syracuse 74, Drexel 54: At Syracuse, N.Y., Hakim Warrick scored 21 points and Darryl



Drexel's Jeremiah King is thoroughly fouled by Syracuse's Craig Fort during the first half of the eighth-ranked Orange's 74-54 victory.

Watkins had 14 points and 13 rebounds for Syracuse (9-1). The Orange won their second straight after a loss to No. 4 Oklahoma State and did it by dominating the boards against Drexel (3-4).

No. 9 Kentucky 60, No. 13 Louisville 58: At Louisville, Patrick Sparks made three free throws with 0.6 seconds left to cap his 25-point performance and complete a comeback from a 16-point deficit by Kentucky (7-1). Louisville (6-2) went ahead 58-57 on Larry O'Bannon's two free throws with 15 seconds left.

No. 10 Pittsburgh 73, Coppin St. 42: At Pittsburgh, Chris Taft scored 18 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for Pittsburgh (8-0). Carl Krauser added 17 points for the Panthers.

No. 15 Arizona 48, Marquette 43: At Milwaukee, with leading

scorer Salim Stoudamire benched, Arizona (7-2) relied on Chris Rodgers' 16 points and key late layup to beat Marquette (9-1). It was the Arizona's lowest scoring output in nearly 20 years.

No. 16 Iowa 88, W. Carolina 75: At Iowa City, Iowa, Jeff Horner scored 17 of his 20 points in the second half, almost single-handedly opened what had been a tight game.

Iowa (9-1) led by only seven after a sloppy first half, and Western Carolina (5-7) hung around for a while in the second half before Horner took over.

No. 17 Alabama 87, Tennessee St. 79: At Tuscaloosa, Ala., Chuck Davis scored 24 points, grabbed 12 rebounds and blocked seven shots to lead Alabama.

Alabama (9-1) never trailed in the game and led by as many as

25 points in the second half before Tennessee State rallied late, mostly against reserves.

Kennedy Winston scored 19 points for Alabama, while Earnest Shelton had 15.

No. 19 George Washington 85, Towson 69: At Washington, D.C., Pops Mensah-Bonsu scored 15 points and Ricky Lucas added 13 of his season-high 14 points in the second half to help George Washington (7-1) win its seventh straight.

Omari Williams scored 10 of his 12 points in the first 10 minutes of the second half, and finished with eight rebounds for the Colonials.

No. 20 Mississippi St. 80, Xavier 74: At Cincinnati, Winston Frazier emerged from a deep shooting slump by scoring 20 points and No. 20 Mississippi State kept its road streak going by beating Xavier.

The Bulldogs (9-2) won their 14th straight road game, the longest current streak in Division I.

Mississippi State shot a season-high 54 percent from the field.

Xavier (2-4) has lost three consecutive home games.

No. 21 Michigan St. 63, Delaware St. 45: At East Lansing, Mich., Chris Hill had 14 points, including four three-pointers, Kelvin Torbert added 12 points and Shannon Brown had 10 for the Spartans (6-2).

No. 25 Cincinnati 81, Northwestern St. 65: At Cincinnati, Jason Maxwell scored 21 points, including 14 in the second half, to lead Cincinnati (7-0), which is ranked for the first time this season.

The game was coach Bob Huggins' 500th at Cincinnati, where he is 381-119.

Tramaine Hancock scored 12 points and Clifford Lee added 11 to lead Northwestern State (5-5), which lost its third straight after a five-game winning streak.

Spadafora the star as Gettysburg tops Navy

The Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS — Mike Spadafora scored a career-high 26 points to lead Division III Gettysburg College past Division I Navy 75-69 on Saturday.

Navy (3-6) led 52-37 with 11 minutes to play but Gettysburg (3-4) went on the way to snapping an 11-game losing streak against the Middies dating to Dec. 9, 1992.

Until a one-point victory last season, the Middies had beaten the Bullets by an average of 29 points during that stretch.

The score was 63-63 with 2:35 to play when Spadafora put the Bullets ahead to stay with a free throw.

Spadafora, a transfer from Duquesne, scored 12 of his team's last 14 points including four straight free throws to ice the outcome.

Navy, which made 13 of 14 free throws in the first half, made just five of 13 in the second half.

The Middies also committed 25 turnovers.

Laraine Mergeron led Navy with 16 points and Corey Johnson added 12 points and nine rebounds.

David Hooper added 11 points and George O'Garra 10 for Navy.

Ryan Page, who had 14 points, gave the Bullets a 71-65 lead with a dunk off a steal with 1:07 to play.

Navy led 38-35 at the half after overcoming a 12-3 Gettysburg lead with a 24-7 run for a 27-19 lead with 6:20 to play in the first half.

ESPN says Majerus walks out on USC

BY BETH HARRIS

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Three days after being hired as the new basketball coach at Southern California, Rick Majerus backed out of the deal and will stay at ESPN as a college basketball analyst.

"Rick expressed to us that he had a change of heart and wondered if the possibility still existed for him to work for ESPN. And it does. We told him he could," ESPN spokesman Josh Krulowitz said Saturday night.

Majerus, who cited health reasons when he retired in January after 15 seasons as Utah's coach, was announced as the Trojans' incoming coach last Wednesday. He was to assume the post on April 1.

Majerus did not immediately return phone messages Saturday night.

"We plan to meet with Rick on Monday. Until then, there's really nothing we can say," USC athletic director Mike Garrett said in a statement.

USC spokesman Tim Tessalone said the meeting had already been planned.

Until taking over in April, Majerus was supposed to be on the basketball staff and work on recruiting, filling the assistant's job vacated when Jim Saia was promoted to interim coach after Henry Bibby's firing.

During a campus news conference following his hiring, the 56-year-old Majerus said he wasn't worried about his health.

"My health is good or I wouldn't do this," he said. "Both my doctors encouraged me to do it. I wouldn't put anyone, least of all myself, in harm's way."

Saia last saw Majerus over dinner Wednesday night, when they discussed the program's future. Majerus had soup and salad for dinner and kept apples in his hotel room, Saia said.

"He asked a lot of questions about the staff and players coming back. He just wanted to get a feel from me," Saia told The Asso-

ciated Press on Saturday night, his voice still hoarse from USC's victory over Western Michigan earlier in the day.

Something apparently changed overnight Wednesday.

Majerus canceled a Thursday morning meeting with assistant coach Bob Cantu, then canceled dinner that night with assistant Eric Brown, Saia said. On Friday, Majerus canceled a meeting with the players who would still be eligible next season. He talked to the team briefly Wednesday after being introduced as the new coach.

Saia said there were no reasons given for the assorted cancellations.

"He left a message on my cell Friday night saying he wanted to go back to Milwaukee and spend the holidays with his family and mother," Saia said. "He said he'd see me after Christmas."

The Trojans leave for Hawaii on Sunday to play in the Rainbow Classic. They are 2-1 since Saia took over.

"It'll be great to get away and bond as a team," he said. "I'm an interim coach that maybe has a chance to coach next season. I'd love to stay at USC."

Saia said he's not concerned about the future.

"I can't control what is going to happen," he said. "You could go crazy trying to figure it all out."

UCLA coach Ben Howland was stunned when informed of Majerus' reversal after the Bruins beat Michigan.

"You're kidding me, right?" Howland said. "I hope and will pray it's not over health issues because that was always the biggest concern. That's surprising to me because I know from listening to him how excited he was to come back."

Majerus coached Utah to the national championship game in 1998, losing to Kentucky, one of the school's 10 NCAA tournament appearances during his tenure. His other college stints were at Utah State and Marquette. He was also an assistant with the NBA's Milwaukee Bucks.



Former Utah coach Rick Majerus, hired last Wednesday to coach USC next season, has indicated that he's changed his mind about the job and is returning to ESPN.

SPORTS



Iverson torches Bucks
for season-high 54 points,
Page 30

Vick's vanquishing act



Falcons quarterback Michael Vick dives past Panthers linebacker Dan Morgan into the end zone for the tying touchdown. Atlanta won in overtime.

Remarkable TD run allows Falcons to win in OT

BY PAUL NEWBERRY
The Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Atlanta Falcons were down to their final play. They had the right guy for that perilous position.

Michael Vick ran for a 12-yard touchdown on fourth-and-goal with less than 2 minutes left in regulation, literally flying through the air to get the Falcons to overtime. Jay Feely took it from there, kicking a 38-yard field goal for a 34-31 victory over the Carolina Panthers on Saturday night.

Atlanta snapped the Panthers' five-game winning streak, a blow to the revitalized playoff hopes for the defending NFC champions.

In a game of amazing twists and turns, the Falcons (11-3) pulled off the final comeback. As usual, Vick was right in the middle of things.

"It was not frustrated after they took the lead," he said. "It just motivated me to go out there and put points on the board to win."

Carolina (6-8) got back into playoff contention after a 1-7 start, and the Panthers were as resilient as ever in this one, recovering from a pair of double-digit deficits.

"It doesn't surprise me," Falcons defensive end Patrick Kerney said. "Even if we got up by 50, I figured they would fight and scratch and claw for the win."



Falcons kicker Jay Feely (4) celebrates with his teammates after kicking a 38-yard field goal in overtime to beat the Panthers.

The Panthers went ahead for the first time with a 21-point fourth quarter, only to have the Falcons show they know a thing or two about bouncing back.

Dez White got the Falcons in position for the tying score with a dazzling 54-yard reception. He caught the ball along the sideline at the Carolina 40, spun around with one hand on the turf and sprinted all the way to the 5.

The Panthers knocked the ball away from Vick, but Michael Jenkins recovered for the Falcons at the 2. A holding penalty knocked Atlanta back, but Vick wasn't done.

Vick spotted an opening up the middle and took off for the end zone, diving across with 1:37 remaining. The officials reviewed the play to see if Vick went down before he crossed the goal line,

but replays showed that he somehow kept his left knee suspended about an inch above the turf as he stretched out for the end zone.

"Everyone else had their backs turned to me, so that is why I was able to make it to the end zone," Vick said. "I was lucky to get in there."

Carolina won the coin toss in overtime, only to have Jake Delhomme overthrow Ricky Proehl down the middle. Aaron Bensley made the interception and returned it 30 yards to the Carolina 23.

A couple of safe runs set up Feely, who connected on third down to put the Falcons on the brink of clinching the No. 2 seed in the NFC.

They wrapped up the NFC South the previous week, just the third division title in franchise history.

The Panthers' remarkable turnaround left them sixth in the NFC — the final playoff spot — coming into the weekend. The defending conference champions are now a half-game behind St. Louis, which plays at Arizona on Sunday.

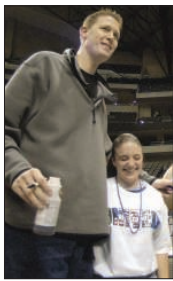
"This team has a lot of heart," coach John Fox said. "They all fought hard. We just came up short."

Vick had an erratic game, going just 11-for-28 for 154 yards with a couple of interceptions. On the flip side, he threw a pair of TD passes and ran eight times for 68 yards.

SEE VICK ON PAGE 32



A's 'Big Three'
down to 1; Mulder
goes to Cards
Page 33



Wounded troops
get up close,
personal with Mavs
Page 29



Gonzaga still has
some zip, upsets
No. 3 Georgia Tech
Page 34

Heidelberg sweeps titles in K-town tournament

Page 29

